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OVER FEN AND WOLD

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MANOR-HOUSE.

942.52
942.5

Over Fen and Wold

BY

JAMES JOHN HISSEY

AUTHOR OF 'A DRIVE THROUGH ENGLAND,' 'ON THE BOX SEAT,' 'THROUGH TEN ENGLISH COUNTIES,' 'ON SOUTHERN ENGLISH ROADS,' ETC.

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown road before me leading wherever I choose.
WHITMAN.

WITH FOURTEEN FULL PAGE (AND SOME SMALLER) ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

AND A MAP OF THE ROUTE

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DEDICATED

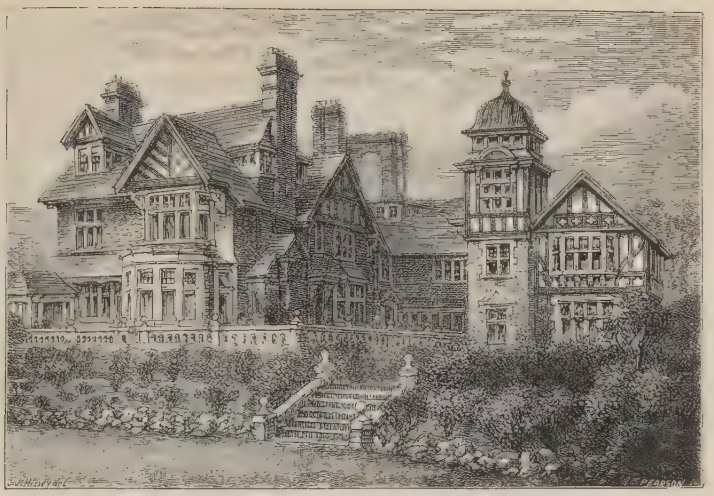
TO THE MOST CHERISHED MEMORY OF

MY ONE-YEAR-OLD SON

WILLIAM AVERELL HISSEY

Darling, if Jesus rose,
Then thou in God's sweet strength hast risen as well;
When o'er thy brow the solemn darkness fell,
It was but one moment of repose.

Thy love is mine—my deathless love to thee!
May God's love guard us till all death is o'er,—
Till thine eyes meet my sorrowing eyes once more,—
Then guard us still, through all eternity!



A HOME OF TO-DAY.

PREFACE

THE following pages contain the chronicle of a leisurely and most enjoyable driving tour through a portion of Eastern England little esteemed and almost wholly, if not quite, neglected by the average tourist, for Lincolnshire is generally deemed to be a flat land, mostly consisting of Fens, and with but small, or no scenic attractions. We, however, found Lincolnshire to be a country of hills as well as of Fens, and we were charmed with the scenery thereof, which is none the less beautiful because neither famed nor fashionable. Some day it may become both. Lincolnshire scenery awaits dis-

covery! Hitherto the pleasure-traveller has not found it out, but that is his loss!

We set forth on our tour, like the renowned Dr. Syntax, "in search of the picturesque," combined with holiday relaxation, and in neither respect did we suffer disappointment. Our tour was an unqualified success. A more delightfully independent, a more restful, or a more remunerative way of seeing the country than by driving through it, without haste or any precisely arranged plan, it is difficult to conceive, ensuring, as such an expedition does, perfect freedom, and a happy escape from the many minor worries of ordinary travel—the only thing absolutely needful for the driving tourist to do being to find an inn for the night.

Writing of the joys of road-travel in the pre-railway days George Eliot says, "You have not the best of it in all things, O youngsters! The elderly man has his enviable memories, and not the least of them is the memory of a long journey on the outside of a stage-coach." The railway is most excellent for speed, "but the slow old-fashioned way of getting from one end of the country to the other is the better thing to have in the memory. The happy outside coach-passenger, seated on the

box from the dawn to the gloaming, gathered enough stories of English life, enough aspects of earth and sky, to make episodes for a modern Odyssey." And so did we seated in our own dog-cart, more to be envied even than the summer-time coach-passenger, for we had full command over our conveyance, so that we could stop on the way, loiter, or make haste, as the mood inclined.

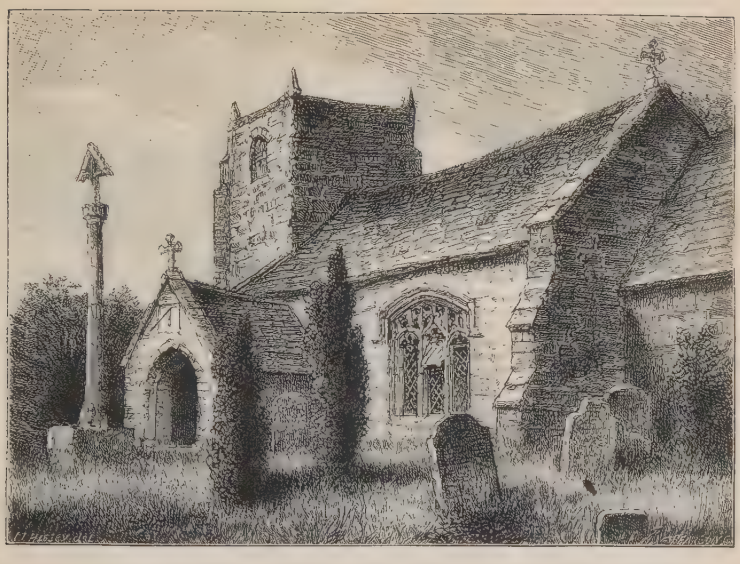
Sir Edwin Arnold says, "This world we live in is becoming sadly monotonous, as it shrinks year by year to smaller and smaller apparent dimensions under the rapid movement provided by limited passenger trains and swift ocean steamships." Well, by driving one enlarges the apparent size of the world, for, as John Burrough puts it, "When you get into a railway carriage you want a continent, but the man in his carriage requires only a county." Very true, moreover the man who steams round the world may see less than the man who merely drives round about an English county: the former is simply conveyed, the latter travels—a distinction with a vast difference!

In conclusion, I have only to express the hope that the illustrations herewith, engraved on wood from my sketches by Mr. George Pearson (to

whom I tender my thanks for the pains he has taken in their reproduction), may lend an added interest to this unvarnished record of a most delightful and health-giving holiday.

J. J. HISSEY.

1898.



SOMERSBY CHURCH AND CROSS.

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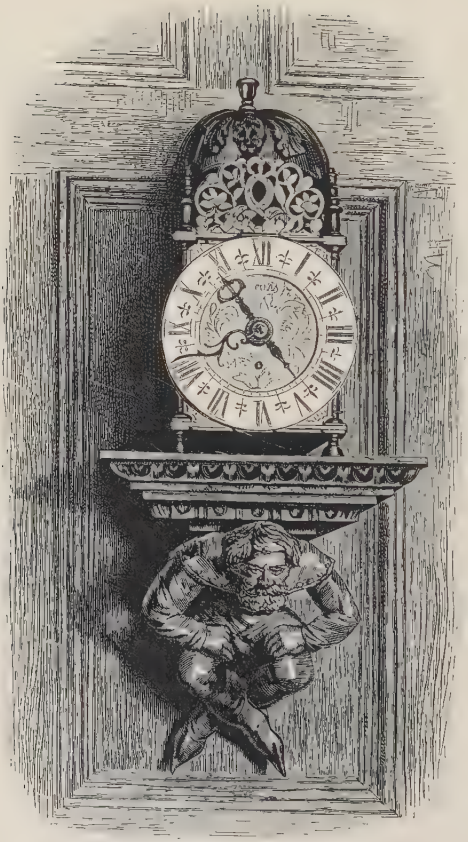

OLD BRASS CROMWELL CLOCK.

See page 8.

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OVER FEN AND WOLD

CHAPTER I

The planning of our tour—Ready for the road—The start—One of Dick Turpin's haunts—Barnet—A curious inn sign—In the coaching days—Travellers, new and old—A forgotten Spa—An ancient map.

Our tour was planned one chilly winter's evening: just a chance letter originated the idea of exploring a portion of Lincolnshire during the coming summer. Our project in embryo was to drive from London to that more or less untravelled land of fen and wold by the old North Road, and to return to our starting-point by another route, to be decided upon when we had finished our Lincolnshire wanderings. It was in this wise. The day had been wild and blustery, as drear a day indeed as an English December well

could make. A bullying "Nor'-Easter" had been blowing savagely ever since the morning, by the evening it had increased to a veritable storm, the hail and sleet were hurled against the windows of our room, and the wind, as it came in fierce gusts, shook the casements as though it would blow them in if it could. My wife and self were chatting about former wanderings on wheels, trying fairly successfully to forget all about the inclement weather without, each comfortably ensconced in a real easy-chair within the ample ingle-nook of that cosy chamber known to the household as "the snuggery" —a happy combination of studio and library—the thick curtains were closely drawn across the mullioned windows to exclude any possible draughts, the great wood fire on the hearth (not one of your black coal fires in an iron grate arrangement) blazed forth right merrily, the oak logs crackled in a companionable way, throwing at the same time a ruddy glow into the room, and the bright flames roared up the wide chimney ever and again with an additional potency in response to extra vehement blasts without.

"What a capital time," I exclaimed, "to look over some of the sketches we made during our last summer holiday; they will help us to recall the long sunny days, those jolly days we spent in the country, and bring back to mind many a pleasant spot and picturesque old home!" No sooner was the idea expressed than I sought out sundry well-filled sketch-books from the old oak corner cupboard devoted to our artistic belongings. True magicians were those sketch-books, with a power superior even to that

of Prince Houssain's carpet of *Arabian Nights* renown, for by their aid not only were we quickly transported to the distant shires, but we also turned back the hand of Time to the genial summer days, and, in spirit, were soon far away repeating our past rambles, afoot and awheel, along the bracken-clad hillsides, over the smooth-turfed Downs, and across the rugged, boulder-strewn moors, here purple with heather and there aglow with golden gorse; anon we were strolling alongside the grassy banks of a certain quiet gliding river beloved of anglers, and spanned, just at a point where an artist would have placed it, by a hoary bridge built by craftsmen dead and gone to dust long centuries ago. Then, bringing forcibly to mind the old beloved coaching days, came a weather-stained hostelry with its great sign-board still swinging as of yore on the top of a high post, and bearing the representation—rude but effective—of a ferocious-looking red lion that one well-remembered summer evening bade us two tired and dust-stained travellers a hearty heraldic welcome. Next we found ourselves wandering down a narrow valley made musical by a little stream tumbling and gambolling over its rocky bed (for the sketches revealed to the mind infinitely more than what the eye merely saw, recalling Nature's sweet melodies, her songs without words, as well as her visible beauties; besides raising within one countless half-forgotten memories)—a stream that turned the great green droning wheel of an ancient water-mill, down to which on either hand gently sloped the wooded hills, and amidst the foliage, half drowned

in greenery, we could discern at irregular intervals the red-tiled rooftrees of lowly cottage homes peeping picturesquely forth. Then we were transported to an old, time-grayed manor-house of many gables and great stacks of clustering chimneys, its ivy-grown walls and lichen-laden roof being backed by rook-haunted ancestral elms; the ancient home, with its quaint, old-fashioned garden and reed-grown moat encircling it, seemed, when we first came unexpectedly thereon, more like the fond creation of a painter or a poet than a happy reality.

"Don't you remember," said my wife, as we were looking at this last drawing, "what a delightful day we spent there, and how the owner, when he discovered us sketching, at once made friends with us and showed us all over the dear old place, and how he delighted in the old armour in the hall, and how he told us that his ancestors fought both at Crecy and Agincourt—how nice it must be to have valiant ancestors like that!—and don't you remember that low-ceilinged, oak-panelled bed-chamber with the leaden-lattice window, *the haunted room*, and how it looked its part; and afterwards how the landlady of the village inn where we baited our horses would have it that the ghost of a former squire who was murdered by some one—or the ghost of somebody who was murdered by that squire, she was not quite sure which—stalks about that very chamber every night. And then there were the curiously-clipped yews on the terrace, and the old carved sun-dial at the end of the long walk, and——" But the last sentence was destined never to be

finished, for at that moment a knock came at the door, followed by a servant bringing in a letter all moist and dripping, a trifling incident, that, however, sufficed to transport us back again from our dreamy wanderings amongst sunny summer scenes to that drear December night—our fireside travels came to an abrupt end!

"What a night for any one to be out," I muttered, as I took the proffered letter, glancing first at the handwriting, which was unfamiliar, then at the post-mark, which bore the name of a remote Lincolnshire town, yet we knew no one in that whole wide county. Who could the sender be? we queried. He proved to be an unknown friend, who in a good-natured mood had written to suggest, in case we should be at a loss for a fresh country to explore during the coming summer, that we should try Lincolnshire; he further went on to remark, lest we should labour under the popular and mistaken impression (which we did) that it was a land more or less given over to "flats, fens and fogs," that he had visitors from London staying with him with their bicycles, who complained loudly of the hills in his neighbourhood; furthermore, "just to whet our appetites," as he put it, there followed a tempting list, "by way of sample," of some of the good things scenic, antiquarian, and archæological, that awaited us, should we only come. Amongst the number—to enumerate only a few in chance order, and leaving out Lincoln and its cathedral—there were Crowland's ruined abbey, set away in the heart of the Fens; numerous old churches, that by virtue of their

remoteness had the rare good fortune to have escaped the restorer's hands, and not a few of these, we were given to understand, contained curious brasses and interesting tombs of knightly warriors and unremembered worthies; Tattershall Castle, a glorious old pile, one of the finest structures of the kind in the kingdom; the historic town of Boston, with its famous fane and "stump" and Dutch-like waterways; Stamford, erst the rival of Oxford and Cambridge, with its Jacobean buildings, crumbling colleges, and quaint "Callises" or hospitals; Grantham, with its wonderful church spire and genuine medieval hostelry, dating back to the fifteenth century, that still offers entertainment to the latter-day pilgrim, and, moreover, makes him "comfortable exceedingly"; besides many an old coaching inn wherein to take our ease; not to mention the picturesque villages and sleepy market-towns, all innocent of the hand of the modern builder, nor the rambling manor-houses with their unwritten histories, the many moated granges with their unrecorded traditions, and perhaps not least, two really haunted houses, possessing well-established ghosts.

Then there was Tennyson's birthplace at pretty Somersby, and the haunts of his early life round about, the wild wolds he loved so and sang of—the Highlands of Lincolnshire!—a dreamy land full of the unconscious poetry of civilisation, primitive and picturesque, yet not wholly unprogressive; a land where the fussy railway does not intrude, and where the rush and stress of this bustling century

has made no visible impression; a land also where odd characters abound, and where the wise sayings of their forefathers, old folk-lore, legends, and strange superstitions linger yet; and last on the long list, and perhaps not least in interest, there was the wide Fenland, full of its own weird, but little understood beauties. Verily here was a tempting programme!

Pondering over all these good things, we found ourselves wondering how it was that we had never thought of Lincolnshire as fresh ground to explore before. Did we not then call to mind what a most enjoyable tour we had made through the little-esteemed Eastern Counties? though before starting on that expedition we had been warned by friends—who had never been there, by the way—that we should repent our resolve, as that portion of England was flat, tame, and intensely uninteresting, having nothing to show worth seeing, fit for farming and little else. Yet we remembered that we discovered the Langton Hills on our very first day out, and still retained a vivid impression of the glorious views therefrom, and all the rest of the journey was replete with pleasant surprises and scenic revelations. Truly we found the Land of the Broads to be flat, but so full of character and special beauty as to attract artists to paint it. "Therefore," we exclaimed, "why should not Lincolnshire prove equally interesting and beautiful?" Perhaps even, like the once tourist-neglected Broads, the charms and picturesqueness of Lincolnshire may some day be discovered, be guidebook-lauded as a delightful holiday ground. Who knows? Besides, there was

the drive thither and back along the old coach-roads to be remembered; that of itself was sure to be rewarding.

The letter set us a-thinking, and the special shelf in our little library where sundry road-books and county maps are kept was searched for a chart of Lincolnshire. We were soon deeply engrossed with books and maps, and with their aid planned a very promising tour. By the time the old brass Cromwell clock on the bracket in a corner of the ingle-nook struck twelve we had finally decided, for good or ill, to try Lincolnshire; already we found ourselves longing for the summer time to come that we might be off!

But for all our longings and schemings it was the first of September before we actually set out on our journey; however, if this were unkindly delayed by the Fates, to make amends for such delay it must be confessed that they granted us perfect travellers' weather, for during almost the whole time we were away from home there was not a day either too hot or too cold for open-air enjoyment, we had very little rain, and plenty of sunshine.

According to my experience, the month of September and the first week in October are generally the finest times in the year in England. During our journey we picked up, to us, many fresh bits of weather-lore and old-folk sayings; these are always welcome, and one of them runs thus: "It's a foul year when there are not twenty fine days in September." In that month truly the days are growing gradually shorter, but,

on the other hand, the dust—that one fly in the ointment of the driving tourist—is not so troublesome, indeed on this occasion it did not trouble us at all, nor is the heat so oppressive, nor the light so glaring as in July or August; and if the evenings draw in then, well, it only means an early start to have still a good long day before one, and the dusk coming on as you reach your night's destination is a plausible excuse for indulging in a homelike fire in your apartment; and what a look of friendly familiarity a fire imparts to even a strange room, to say nothing of the mellow glow of candles on the table where your meal is spread! There is something indescribably cheery and suggestive of comfort, cosiness, and taking your ease about a fire-warmed and candle-lighted room! Truly there are certain compensating advantages in the early evenings! Did not Charles Lamb, writing to a brother poet, Bernard Barton, exclaim of July, "Deadly long are the days, these summer all-day days, with but a half-hour's candle-light and no fire-light at all"?

Now, kind reader, please picture in your mind's eye our comfortable and roomy dog-cart, carefully packed with all our necessary baggage, rugs, and waterproofs, the latter in case of cold or wet; our sketching and photographic paraphernalia; and even every luxury that long experience, gleaned from many former expeditions of a like nature, could suggest; not forgetting a plentiful supply of good tobacco of our favourite mixture, nor yet books to beguile a possible dull hour, which, however, never

occurred. Amongst the books was a copy of Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake*, as this treats of the Fenland heroes, as well as describes much of the low-land scenery of Lincolnshire. When I add that we included in our "kit" a supply of candles in case the light at some of the country inns should be too poor to read or write by comfortably, I think it may be taken for granted that nothing was forgotten that would in any way add to our ease or pleasure. It is astonishing how materially the thought of such apparent trifles adds to the enjoyment of an outing like ours. Even a good field-glass enhances the interest of a wide prospect, such as is continually met with during a lengthened driving tour, by enabling one the better to make out any special feature in the distant panorama.

Being thus prepared for the road, one cloudy September morning found us driving slowly out of the vast conglomeration of smoke-stained bricks and mortar that go to make the city—or county is it?—of London. Passing the Marble Arch, we reached the Edgware Road, up which we turned our horses' heads, bound first for Barnet, taking Finchley on the way, and striking the Great North Road just beyond the latter place, which famous old coaching and posting highway we proposed to follow right on to "Stamford town" in Lincolnshire.

The morning was warm, cloudy, and rainless, though there had been a prolonged downpour during the night, but the barometer was happily on the rise, the "Forecast" in the paper prophesied only occasional showers, and we gladly noted that

there were frequent patches of blue showing through the cloud-rifts above; all of which points taken together gave promise of improved meteorological conditions, so that, in spite of the dulness of the moment, we drove along in the most optimist of moods, firm in the belief that the day would turn out fine; but fine or wet, we set forth on pleasure bent with a fixed determination, come what might in the shape of weather, to enjoy ourselves, and it would have taken a good deal more than a few showers just then to damp our jubilant holiday spirits.

No children fresh from school could have felt "jollier" than we did on that memorable morning, at perfect liberty to wander whither we would, masters of our conveyance, with no anxiety as to luggage, bound by no tiresome time-tables, but departing and arriving at pleasure, stopping here and there when anything of interest attracted our attention, loitering by the way or hastening along at our own sweet pleasure: the freedom of the road was ours, more desirable to us than the freedom of any city, however great that city might be; and the former is to be had by all, and the latter is only for the favoured few!

Now, kind reader, if you will permit me to call you so once more, as at last we really have started on our tour, I take the opportunity to crave your welcome company, and cordially invite you in spirit to mount on to the box-seat and join us in our pleasant pilgrimage along the highways and by-ways of this little-travelled corner of Old England, and allow me to do the honours of the country as we

pass through it, and for the nonce to act the part of "guide, philosopher, and friend."

For the first few miles it was a getting-out-of-town all the way; houses and villas lined the road more or less, with tantalising peeps between—peeps ever growing wider and more frequent—of the greenful country stretching away to the blue horizon beyond, a beyond that looked very alluring to our town-tired eyes. We drove on apace, for we found nothing to specially interest or detain us till we reached Barnet; we felt only anxious to escape as speedily as possible from the ever-spreading domain of bricks and mortar, and to reach the real open country, where pleasant footpaths take the place of the hard pavements, and fragrant hedgerows, verdurous meadows, and tilled fields with their green and golden crops that of houses raised by the speculative builder—to sell. How much better was the old system of men building their own homes to live in! The speculative builder is the unhappy product of a progressive (?) century; he perhaps is responsible for the uglification of London more than aught else, and, alas! is still adding to it.

Passing through the once rural hamlet of Whetstone, it was difficult to realise that this now frequented spot was erst the favourite hunting-ground of that famous (or infamous, if you will) arch-highwayman, Dick Turpin. Great indeed was the terror inspired by his name, for it is recorded that many a Scotch nobleman, squire, and merchant of the period, having occasion to go from Edinburgh to London or *vice versa*,

actually preferred to risk the dangers and suffer the certain discomforts of the then tedious sea voyage between those places, rather than face the possibility of meeting with Master Turpin—lord of the road from London to York! A driving tour would have afforded plenty of excitement in those days, though I shall ever maintain that adventures —and this from personal experiences of such with Indians, bears, and rattlesnakes, whilst exploring the wild forests and mountains of far-off California —are vastly better to read about than to experience. Adventures are excellent things to relate to your friends in after-dinner talk, if you can only get them to take you seriously!

Arriving at Barnet, we pulled up at the "Red Lion," and rested there to bait our horses. The sign of the inn—perhaps the most popular of all English signs—was not painted on a board and upheld by a post, as so frequently obtains in old-fashioned hostelries such as this; but the lion was carved in wood, and skilfully carved too, whilst to add to his dignity we found him rejoicing in a fresh coat of vermilion, and still further to attract the wayfarer's attention he was supported upon a wrought-iron bracket that projected right over the pavement. This sign, standing thus boldly aloft on its great bracket, was a point of interest in the everyday street for the eye to dwell upon—an interest emphasised by past-time associations, for thus, before the coming of the iron horse, had it greeted our inn-loving forefathers when journeying this way, and in a pleasantly defiant manner bade them stop and

take their ease; not that they needed much pressing to do so, for did not the worthy Dr. Johnson, when posting across country, frequently exclaim, "Here is an inn; let us rest awhile"? But that was in the leisurely days gone by when mortals had more time to call their own. I have often wondered, could he be conjured back to life again, what the worthy doctor would think of present-time ways, what he would say of the railways, but above all, what his opinion would be of the huge company hotel, where he would find his individuality merged in a mere number. I trow he would prefer his comfortable tavern, where he could have his quiet talk—and listeners.

I find, by referring to some ancient and valued road-books in my possession, that the two chief inns of the coaching age at Barnet were the "Red Lion" and the "Green Man," each patronised by rival coaches. The latter sign I imagine, judging from the frequent mention of it in the same authorities, to have been at the period a very common and popular one, though now apparently gone entirely out of favour. What was the origin of this strange sign I cannot say, but it may be remembered that green men—that is, men with their faces, arms, and hands stained that hue, and their bodies covered with skins—were frequently to be found amongst the processions and pageants of the sight-loving Middle Ages, such a "get-up" being intended to represent a savage, and constant mention of them was made in the old writings and plays. In the play of *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (1594) one of the characters is

made to say, "Comes there a pageant by? Then I'll stand out of the green man's way." I find also, in Dr. Brewer's *Handbook of Allusions*, an extract given from a play of a year later, entitled, *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, which runs as follows:—"Have you any squibs, or green man in your shows?" During the next century, and for some time afterwards, gamekeepers were usually clad in green, a fact noted by Crabbe:

> But the green man shall I pass by unsung? . . .
> A squire's attendant clad in keeper's green.

At one or other of these two once famous hostels the old coaches took their first change out, or their last change in, and not much time was allowed for or lost in the changing either; for if our ancestors, according to modern notions, made haste slowly, at least they made all the haste they knew. The now quiet (except at the time of the noted horse fair) Barnet High Street was then astir all the day long and half the night with the coming and going of coaches, to say nothing of "posters," and the roadway rang with the rattle and clatter of fast travelling teams, the air was resonant with the musical echoes of the frequent horn, whilst the hurried shout of "next change" kept the inn-yards alive and ready, the ostlers alert. Steam has changed all this; now we travel more speedily but less picturesquely, more luxuriously but less romantically. Why, the very meaning of the word travel—derived, my dictionary informs me, from "travail; excessive toil"—has surely wholly lost its signification in this easy-going

age of Pullman cars, and mail steamers that are in reality floating palaces? Yet somehow I sometimes find myself sighing for a little less luxury and speed, and for more of the picturesqueness and good-fellowship engendered by the conditions of old-time travel, that stands out in such sharp antithesis to the ugliness and unmannerly taciturnity that has come with the railway; the ugliness is universal, but the taciturnity, for some cause I cannot fathom, is confined mostly to England.

Said a prominent citizen of Chicago to me one day, upon his arrival at St. Pancras Station, where I went to meet him as my visitor, in response to my greetings: "Well, sir, as you kindly ask me, I guess I had a mighty pleasant voyage in the steamer, and found your countrymen aboard most agreeable and entertaining; but when I got on the cars at Liverpool with four other Britishers, we had a regular Quakers' meeting-time all the way to London, and when I chanced to make a remark they really appeared utterly astonished that a stranger should venture to address them. Now that just strikes me as peculiar, and if that's your land-travelling manners I guess I don't much admire them; surely there's no sin in one stranger politely speaking to another; indeed, it seems sort of rude to me to get into a car and never as much as utter 'Good morning,' or 'I beg your pardon,' as you pass a party by to take your seat. Perhaps you can tell me just how it is that your countrymen are so stand-offish on the cars?" But we could not answer the question satisfactorily to the querist or to ourselves.

It may be news to many—it was to me till the other day, when quite accidentally I came across the fact in an ancient road-book—that in the days of Charles II. Barnet was a watering-place of considerable repute, even disputing supremacy with its rising rival of Tunbridge Wells. In a field near the town on the Elstree Road is the formerly famous but now almost forgotten chalybeate spring known two centuries ago as the "Physic Well," and much resorted to by the fashionable folk of the Restoration days. On glancing over the ever fresh and entertaining *Diary* of Samuel Pepys, that chatty old-time road-traveller, who was always getting up "betimes" and starting off somewhere or another, I noted the following entry:—"11 August 1667 (Lord's Day). —Up by four o'clock, and ready with Mrs. Turner" (why so often without your wife, good Mr. Pepys?) "to take coach before five; and set out on our journey, and got to the Wells at Barnett by seven o'clock" (not a great rate of speed), "and there found many people a-drinking; but the morning is a very cold morning, so as we were very cold all the way in the coach. . . . So after drinking three glasses, and the women nothing" (wise women), "we back by coach to Barnett, where to the Red Lyon, where we 'light, and went up into the great room, and drank and eat . . . and so to Hatfield," where he "took coach again, and got home with great content."

Amongst my prized possessions is a quaint and ancient map of London and the country for about twenty miles round. This interesting map I find,

by an inscription enclosed in a roll at the foot, was printed, and presumably engraved, in Amsterdam, when I cannot say, for unfortunately no date is given; an antiquarian friend of mine, however (an authority on old prints), declares it to be of about the time of Charles II., though he says it might possibly be copied from an earlier production of the same kind and made up to that approximate date. It is just probable, therefore, that Mr. Pepys may have seen, and used, a similar map; and on mine I find "Barnett Wells" duly marked at a point about a mile south-west of the town.

These ancient maps, besides being very interesting, oftentimes reveal the origin of puzzling place-names otherwise untraceable; for instance, I never could account for the peculiar title of the little Sussex town of Uckfield until one day I found it spelt "Oakefield" on an old map, and as oaks still abound in the locality, I have no doubt that Uckfield was evolved therefrom; and I could enumerate many other instances of a like nature. So, on further consulting my Amsterdam chart, I find Hatfield, which we shall reach in due course, given as "Heathfield,"—now from this to Hatfield is an easy transition; next I observe that the country immediately north of Barnet is represented as wild and unenclosed, and is marked "Gladmore Heath." A corner of this bears the gruesome but suggestive title "Dead-man's Bottom": it is highly probable that the famous battle of Barnet was fought on this open waste, it being a suitable site for such a conflict, and the "Dead-man's Bottom" may mark

the spot where a number of the slain were buried. Hertfordshire is also rendered, as now generally pronounced, "Hartfordshire," so perhaps it is the spelling, not the pronunciation, that has changed. A wonderful production is this old map, for in the apparently sparsely populated country around the then moderate-sized city of London each church tower is pictured in miniature; even solitary houses, including numerous farmsteads, are so shown; tiny drawings of windmills abound; and on the rivers, wheels are marked here and there, evidently intended to point out the position of sundry water-mills; bridges over the rivers are infrequent, but fords across and ferries over them are plentiful; now and again one is reminded of other days and other ways by a dot, inscribed above or below, simply but sufficiently "The Gallows"—a familiar but gruesome spectacle, the reality of which must often have been forced on the unwelcome sight of past-time travellers, and possibly haunted the memories and dreams of the more nervous amongst them for long afterwards. Even at one lonely place the map condescends to place a solitary tree with the title "Half-way Tree." On the little river Wandle several water-mills are shown, most of which bear merely names, but sometimes is added the kind of mill. I note on this same short stream the following kinds: "Iron mill," "copper mill," "pouder mill," and one "brasile mill," whatever that may be. On the river Lea I find a "paper mill," but that is the only one of the sort I can discover, though "pouder" mills abound. The latter perhaps were called into requisition by the

recent Civil wars. One lonely house is marked "hanted." Could this possibly mean haunted? But I must stop my disquisition, for I could easily discourse for a whole chapter upon this curious map, were I to let my pen run away with me as it is inclined to do.

CHAPTER II

Memorial of a great battle—An ancient fire-cresset—Free feasting!—Country quiet—Travellers' tales—Hatfield—An Elizabethan architect—An author's tomb—Day-dreaming—Mysterious roadside monuments—Great North Road *versus* Great Northern Railway—Stevenage—Chats by the way—Field life—Nature as a painter—Changed times.

LEAVING Barnet, we soon reached a bit of triangular green enlivened by a pond that was just then monopolised by geese; here, where the old and formerly famous "Parliamentary and Mail Coach Turnpike" to Holyhead diverges from the almost equally famous Great North Road of the pre-railway days, stands a gray stone obelisk that challenges the attention of the passer-by, and is inscribed with history thus:

Here was
Fought the
Famous Battle
Between Edward
the 4th. and the
Earl of Warwick
April the 14th.
Anno
1471.
In which the Earl
Was defeated
And Slain.

I regret to have to record that immediately below this inscription, cut also in the stone, and in the same kind and size of lettering, is the obtrusive warning notice, so over-familiar to nineteenth-century eyes, "Stick no Bills." What bathos this!

Here at Hadley the ancient church tower is surmounted by a rare and interesting relic of the never-returning past in the shape of an iron cresset or fire-beacon. The last time that this was used seriously was in 1745, during the scare occasioned by the Stuart rising in the North. The story goes that at the late hour in the evening when the beacon was lighted, a large party from London, who had been feasting at the "Red Lion" at Barnet upon the best that mine host could lay before them, all rushed out during the excitement and quite forgot to return and pay their reckoning! A curious example of forgetfulness caused by excitement, as the fact that their bill remained unpaid never appears to have occurred to any of the party in after days! This is a sample of one of the stories of the road that, improved upon and embellished to fancy, the coachmen of the past used to entertain their passengers with; there was hardly a house, and certainly very few inns, on the way but had some little incident, history, or tradition connected with it; these latter afforded the jehus of the period (past-masters in the art of embroidering fiction upon fact) plenty of raw material for the production of their wonderful fund of anecdotes. My grandfather, who had travelled a good deal by coach in his early life, said that the virtue of these stories lay not so much in the matter as in

the inimitable way in which they were told; but therein is the art of story-telling—the craft of making much out of simple materials.

The primitive mode of signalling events by beacon had this serious drawback, that, should any one beacon by accident or set purpose be set alight, needless alarm was forthwith spread throughout the land, and no amount of care in watching the various collections of piled-up wood and other inflammable material could, experience proved, prevent mischievous or designing persons from sometimes surreptitiously lighting them; on the other hand, when they were lighted legitimately, possibly fraught with warning of great import to the State, sudden fogs and storms occasionally prevented the message from speeding on its way. It must have been both a picturesque and a thrilling sight in "the brave days of old" for the expectant watchers on some commanding eminence to observe the progress of the blazing beacons, as one answered the other from height to height, the ruddy glare of the fiery signals gleaming plainly forth against the darkness of the night.

On from Hadley to Hatfield we had an excellent road, that led us through a prettily wooded and pleasantly undulating country. As we drove along, rejoicing in the pure sweet air and rural quietude after the smoke-laden atmosphere and noise of town, the sunshine kept struggling through the gray clouds overhead, and great gleams of golden light came and went, warming and brightening up the little world around us, and enhancing the natural beauty

of the scenery by the varied effects they produced on the landscape. A gleamy day is a picture-making and picture-suggesting day, as artists full well know. By the time we reached Hatfield the sun above had obtained complete mastery of the situation, and was doing his best to make all things below pleasant for us.

At Hatfield we pulled up at another "Red Lion," and there we elected to rest a while and "refresh the inner man," as the country-paper reporters have it, for our halt at Barnet was solely for the benefit of our horses. In the coffee-room we found a party of four gentlemen lunching; laughing and talking, their conversation was carried on in so loud a tone of voice that, willing or unwilling, we could not help hearing nearly all they said; their jovial jokes they made public property, and the general good-humour and enjoyment of the party was quite infectious. Manifestly they had no fear of strangers overhearing their tales and talk, which rather surprised us, as sundry anecdotal reminiscences of famous personages were freely related, which, if one could only have felt sure of their veracity, would have been most entertaining. It was indeed a right merry, possibly an inventive, and certainly a rather noisy, quartet. Truly the various people that the road-traveller comes in contact with from time to time often dispute interest with the scenery. As Sir Arthur Helps says, "In travel it is remarkable how much more pleasure we obtain from unexpected incidents than from deliberate sight-seeing," and it certainly appears to me that a driving tour specially

lends itself to meeting with incidents. Such an informal and unusual way of wandering puts you as a rule on a friendly, companionable footing with everybody you meet: people take an interest in your journey, they confide in you and you in them, there is a sort of freemasonry about the road that has its attractions, you seem to belong to the countryside, to be a part and parcel of your surroundings for the time being, in strong contrast with the stranger suddenly arriving by the railway from somewhere far away. He is brought, the driving tourist comes —a distinction with a difference!

But to return to the coffee-room of our inn. Amongst the anecdotes that were forced upon our attention, one still remains in my memory, and this I think worth repeating as a fair sample of the rest, and because it deserves to be true, though possibly it is not, or only in part; however, here it is, and I trust if any one of that merry company should by chance read this, they will pardon the liberty I have taken—or else be more careful of their conversation for the future in public! The story is of a perfectly harmless nature, and characteristic of the parties concerned, or I would not repeat it. It appears then that one day Carlyle was making a first call upon Millais at his fine mansion in Palace Gate. After looking around the sumptuous interior, Carlyle presently exclaimed, in his gruff manner, "What! all from paint?" Millais made no reply at the moment, but as his guest was leaving he quietly remarked, "By the way, what a reputation you've got, Carlyle—and all from ink."

One anecdote begets another, and the foregoing distantly reminds me of a story of Turner that came to me through a private source, which therefore I do not believe has got into print yet—but I may be mistaken. Once upon a time then—as the fairy stories begin, for I am not certain about the exact date, and do not care to guess it—a certain art patron demanded of Turner the price of one of his pictures, with a view to purchasing the same, and deeming that Turner asked rather a large sum, he jokingly exclaimed, "What, all those golden guineas for so much paint on so much canvas?" To which the famous artist replied, "Oh no, not for the paint, but for the use of the brains to put it on with!" and I think the artist scored.

Now I am wandering again, but not by road, as I set out to do, and instead of enjoying the pleasant scenery and fresh air, I am wasting the time indoors chatting about people. Let us get into the open country again, and before we start on the next stage, there will be just time to stroll round and take a glance at the fine old Jacobean pile of Hatfield House, a glorious specimen of the renaissance of English architecture that vividly recalls the half-forgotten fact that once we were, without gainsaying, an artistic people; for no one but a great artist could have designed such a picturesque and stately abode, two qualities not so easy to combine as may be imagined.

It is a most singular fact that the name of the architect of this majestic mansion is not known; but the building so distinctly reminds me of the work of

John Thorpe that I have no hesitation in putting it down to his creative genius. He was beyond all doubt the greatest architect of the Elizabethan age; it was he who designed the glorious mansions of Burleigh "by Stamford town," Longford Castle, Wollaton Hall, most probably Hardwicke Hall, Holland House, and many other notable and picturesque piles, not to forget Kirby in Northants, now, alas! a splendid ruin, which we shall visit on our homeward way.

Writing of the stately homes of England, it seems to me that the stones of England have their story to tell as well as the "Stones of Venice," over which Ruskin goes into such raptures. Why is it ever thus, that other lands seem more attractive than our own; wherein lies the virtue of the far-away? Who will do for Old England at our own doors what Ruskin has so lovingly done for Venice of the past? What a song in stone is Salisbury's splendid cathedral, with its soaring spire rising like an arrow into the air; what a poem is Tintern's ruined abbey by the lovely Wye-side; what a romance in building is Haddon's feudal Hall; what a picture is Compton Wynyates' moated manor-house! and these are but well-known specimens, jotted down hastily and at haphazard, of countless other such treasures, that are scattered all over our pleasant land in picturesque profusion, but which I will not attempt to enumerate catalogue fashion.

Between Hatfield and Welwyn I find no mention of the country in my note-book, nor does my memory in any way call it to mind; the scenery,

therefore, could not have impressed us, and so may be termed of the uneventful order. At the sleepy little town of Welwyn we came upon its gray-toned church standing close by the road, and as we noticed the door thereof was invitingly open, we called a halt in order to take a peep inside. We made it a point this journey never to pass by an ancient church, if near at hand, without stepping within for a glance, should happily, as in this case, the door be open; but with one or two rare exceptions we did not go a-clerk-hunting,—that sport is apt to pall upon the traveller in time, unless he be a very hardened antiquary or ardent ecclesiologist. It was an open or closed door that generally settled the point for us, whether to see a certain church or leave it unseen! We were not guide-book compilers, we did not undertake our journey with any set idea of "doing" everything, we took it solely for the purpose of spending a pleasant holiday, so we went nowhere nor saw anything under compulsion. I think it well to explain our position thus clearly at the start, so that I may not hereafter be reproached for passing this or that unvisited; nor now that our outing is over do I believe we missed much that was noteworthy on the way—nothing, indeed, of which I am aware; though, by some strange caprice of fate, it ever seems that when the traveller returns home from a tour, should anything escape his observation thereon, some kind friend is certain to assure him that just what he failed to see happened to be the very thing of the whole journey the best worth seeing! Indeed, this incident so

regularly re-occurs to me, that I have become quite philosophical on the subject! There is no novelty about the same experience often repeated; the only rejoinder it provokes on my part is a smiling "Of course," or a mild, remonstrating "Oh! I left that for another day."

On entering Welwyn church, we encountered a talkative old body; why she was there I cannot say, for she was apparently doing nothing, and this is no tourist-haunted region with guides of both sexes on the watch and wait for the unwary; but there she was, a substantial personage not to be overlooked. At once she attached herself to us, and asked if we had come to see Dr. Young's tomb—"him as wrote the *Night Thoughts*." We meekly replied that we did not even know that he was buried there. "Well," she responded, "now I do wonders at that, I thoughts as how everybody knew it." From the superior tone in which she said this, we felt that she looked down upon us as ignoramuses—such is the lot of the traveller who does not know everything! Then she pointed out with a grimy finger—assuming the aggravating air of one who has valuable information to impart, and will impart it whether you will or no—a marble slab put up to the memory of the worthy doctor (I presume he was a worthy doctor) on the south wall of the nave. Having duly inspected this, our self-appointed guide suddenly exclaimed, still maintaining her amusing didactic manner, "He'd much better have gone to bed and slept like a good Christian than have sit up o' nights a-writing his thoughts." We weakly

smiled acquiescence, though perhaps it was hardly a fair thing to do, for we had to confess to ourselves that we had not even read the book in question. "Have you?" we queried. "Lor' bless you, sir," replied she, still in an authoritative tone of voice, "books is all rubbish, I never reads rubbish; give me the papers with some news in 'em, I says, that's the reading for me," and with this we took our hurried departure. We have taught the people to read, which is a most excellent thing, but, from all my experience, the country folk prefer newspapers, frequently of a trashy nature, to solid books; for the present they devour the "penny dreadful," whilst the cheap classic remains unread!

Out of Welwyn the road mounted slightly, and to our left we passed a large park; the sun's rays glinting down between the big tree-trunks therein sent long lines of golden light athwart the smooth sward, and the lengthening shadows suggested to us that the day was growing old, and that, unless we wished to be belated, we had better hasten on. Then followed a pleasant stretch of wooded country, the west all aglow with the glory of the setting sun, whilst a soft grayness was gradually spreading over the east, blotting out all trivial details, and causing the landscape there to assume a dim, mysterious aspect; in that direction the scenery might be commonplace enough in the glaring light of mid-day—possibly it was, but just then under that vague effect it looked quite poetical, and by giving our romantic fancies full rein we could almost have imagined that there lay the enchanted forest of

fairy-tale renown. A little occasional romancing may be allowed on a driving tour; he is a dull and unpoetic soul, indeed, who never indulges in a moment's harmless day-dreaming now and again!

Soon the slumberous, unprogressive little town of Stevenage came in view, and just before it, on a green space to the right of the road, we espied six curious-looking, grass-grown mounds all in a row, like so many pigmy green pyramids. We afterwards learnt that these are supposed to be Danish Barrows; but learned antiquaries, like most of their kind, are not all agreed upon this point, though the majority hold to the Danish theory. Still, Danish or not, there they stand to challenge the curiosity of the observant wayfarer. A roadside enigma that doubtless puzzled our forefathers, and afforded food for discussion when journeying in these parts, the railway traveller misses them and much else besides as he is whirled through the land at a speed that only permits of a blurred impression of fields and woods, of rivers and hills, of church towers, towns, hamlets, and farmsteads—that is, when the train is not rushing through a cutting, or plunging into a darksome tunnel. In a scenic sense between the Great North Road and the Great Northern Railway is a vast gulf!

At the present day, at any rate at the time we were there, these prehistoric relics were serving the undistinguished purpose of a ready-made and somewhat original recreation-ground for the town's children; for as we passed by we observed quite a number of them climbing up and down the barrows,

playing "King of the Castle" thereon, and generally romping over and round about them with much noisy merriment. I really think that these ancient mounds deserve to be better cared for; those things that are worthy of being preserved should be preserved, for antiquity once destroyed can never be replaced; it is too late when a monument of the past has disappeared to discover how interesting it was.

At Stevenage we put up for the night at the "White Lion," a homely little hostelry, where we found clean and comfortable, if not luxurious, quarters for ourselves, and good accommodation for our horses, and not being of an exacting nature, were well content. So ended our first long day's wanderings.

We had seen so much since we left London in the early morning, that we felt it difficult to realise, on the authority of our copy of *Paterson's Roads* (last edition of 1829), we had only travelled some thirty-one miles; the precise distance we could not arrive at, since Paterson takes his measurement from "Hick's Hall," and we did not start from the site thereof; indeed, exactly where "Hick's Hall" stood I am not very clear—somewhere in Smithfield, I believe.

Next morning, following the excellent example of the chatty Mr. Pepys, and to borrow his favourite expression, we "awoke betimes," to find the sunshine streaming in through our windows, whilst a glance outside revealed to us a glorious bright blue sky, flecked with fleecy fine-weather clouds.

This cheery morning greeting could not be resisted, so, early though it was, we got up and dressed without any needless delay, and, sketch-book in hand, set forth to explore the place before breakfast, which, however, we took the precaution of ordering to be ready for us on our return, for it is trying for a hungry man to have to wait for his meal! Before going out, however, we paid our usual visit of inspection to the horses, who, we discovered, were having their toilet performed for them, luxurious creatures! though not without much "sishing," and subdued exclamations of "Whoa! my beauty," "Steady there now," "Hold up, can't yer"—sounds and utterances dear to the hearts of grooms and ostlers. We were glad to note that the horses looked fit and fresh, and not a whit the worse for their previous hard day's work.

On the road we have always found that it is the pace rather than the distance that "knocks up cattle"; but haste formed no part of our programme, as we travelled to see and enjoy the scenery, not merely to pass through it, to sketch, to photograph, to inspect a ruin, or to do whatever took our fancy at the time; also to chat at our leisure with any one who appeared to be interesting and willing to chat—prepared under those conditions to converse with anybody from a ploughboy to a peer that chance might bring across our path, so that we might learn "how the world wags" according to the different parties' views.

As Montaigne remarked, "Every man knows some one thing better than I do, and when I meet

a stranger therefore I engage him in conversation to find that one thing out." So we have discovered that even a lightly-esteemed ploughboy, familiar all his life with Nature in her many moods, at home in the fields and hedgerows, could tell us many things we did not know, which are common knowledge to him. A chat with an intelligent ploughboy, for such boys exist, may prove a profitable and interesting experience, for perchance it may be racy of the soil, full of the ways of wild birds and winged things, of the doings of hares, rabbits, weasels, foxes, and other animals belonging to the countryside, and of countless idle-growing things besides; above all, it is genuinely rural, and conveys an unmistakable flavour of the open air.

An intelligent rustic is unconsciously a close Nature-observer, and by listening to what he has got to say, if you can only get him to talk and keep him to his subject, you may make valuable use of the eyes of others who can see, but give small thought to what they see.

The works of White of Selborne and of Richard Jefferies have proved how attractive and refreshing to the town-tired brain are the faithful and simple record of the natural history of the English fields and woodlands, and the descriptions of the charms and beauties of the English country in all its varied aspects. One great value of such writings is that they induce people to search for, and teach them how to seek out, similar beauties for themselves in their everyday surroundings, that they never before so much as imagined to exist. So that truly a new,

a costless, and a lasting pleasure in life is opened out to them.

We found Stevenage to be a quiet, neat little town of the "thoroughfare" type, to employ a term much in vogue in the coaching days when describing places consisting chiefly of one long street. Wandering about, we noticed an old building that had manifestly been a hostelry of some importance in the pre-railway period, the archway giving entrance to the stable-yard still remaining. Now the building is converted into a pleasant residence, though, owing to the necessities of its former uses, it stands too close to the roadway to afford that privacy which the home-loving Briton so dearly delights in ; which, on the other hand, the average American citizen so heartily dislikes, considering such comparative seclusion to make for dulness, and to savour of unsociability. Such old buildings, converted, wholly or in part, from inns to houses, are to be found frequently along the Great North Road. A stranger, not aware of the fact, might well wonder why those great houses were built with their ample arches in the little village street, and so close upon the roadside.

At one end of the town we found a rather pretty gabled cottage with a high-pitched roof, from which rose a good group of chimneys. This cottage, with its tiny garden railed off from the footpath by a wooden paling, made quite a charming subject for the pencil, and was the first to adorn our sketch-book. Whilst putting a few finishing touches to our drawing, a native came up. An artist at work always

seems to have an irresistible attraction for country people. He opened up a conversation by admiring our sketch, though in a qualified manner. He was pleased to say that it was "mighty" pretty, only he preferred a photograph to a drawing any day. He had had a photograph taken of his house lately, and on the photograph you could count every brick on the walls and every tile on the roofs. "Now, that's what I call a proper kind of picture,—not but that yours is very nice for hand-work"!

This is a very fair specimen of the criticisms that the long-enduring landscape painter has frequently to put up with when at work in the open.

Next our art-critic and photograph-admirer presumed that we must be strangers, as he knew most of the folk round about, but did not remember having "sighted us afore." We replied that we were. "Now, do you know," responded he, "I was sure of that"; and seeing no advantage in further continuing the conversation, we hastened off to our inn—and breakfast.

In spite of our early rising, it was ten o'clock before we got "under weigh," but when one sets out exploring and sketching, to say nothing of gossiping, time flies.

It was one of those rare and perfect days that come only now and then in the year, which, when they come, linger lovingly in the memory for long after. A stilly day of soft sunshine wherein is no glare; overhead great rounded clouds of golden white, shading off into a tender pearly-gray, were sailing slowly across a sea of pure, pale blue,—clouds

ever varying in size and form, so that the eye was involuntarily attracted to the scenery of the sky, as well as to that of the land; for the changeful sky-scape—as Turner, Constable, and other painters have shown—lends a wonderful charm to our English scenery,—clouds that caused vast cool-gray shadows to chase each other in endless succession over the wide countryside, till, space-diminished, the shadows vanished into infinity, where the circling gray of the dim horizon melted into a misty nothingness.

The warmth of the cheerful sunshine was tempered by a soothing southerly wind—a lazy wind that came to us laden with a mingling of fragrant country odours distilled from flower, field, tree, and countless green growing things as it lightly passed them by. It was a day inspiriting enough, one would have imagined, to convert even a confirmed pessimist into a cheerful optimist, and for us it made the fact of simply existing a something to be thankful for!

Manifestly the Fates were kindly disposed towards us. It was no small matter to start forth thus in the fulness and freshness of such a morning, free as the air we breathed, with our holiday only just beginning, its pleasures barely tasted, and positively no solicitude whatever except to reach an inn for the night; in truth, there was no room for the demon Care in our dog-cart, so he was compelled to stay behind "out of sight" and "out of mind." We were purely on pleasure bent, and we managed very successfully to maintain that part of our programme from the beginning to the end of our tour. Good health means good spirits, and being out so much in

the open air, we laid in a plentiful stock of the former. An out-of-door life, such as the one we led, without fatigue, and with a sufficiency of interest to pleasurably engage the attention, is the finest tonic in the world, I verily believe, for mind and body, bracing both up; so that the answer of the happy driving tourist to the doleful query, "Is life worth living?" would be, to employ the schoolboy's expressive slang, "Very much so."

After Stevenage we entered upon a pleasantly undulating and purely agricultural and pastoral country, with nothing noteworthy till we came to a neat little village that we made out from our map to be Graveley. Here an unpretending inn, the "George and Dragon" to wit, boasted of a fine wrought-iron support for its sign, doubtless a relic of a past prosperity when this was a much-travelled highway, and the hostelries on the road had the benefit of many customers. We noticed that the painting of the sign, at least in our estimation, was sadly inferior in artistic spirit to the clever craftsmanship displayed in the iron-work supporting it; possibly the sign-board was of old as artistically limned as its support was wrought, but the weathering of years would efface the drawing and colouring, and later and less skilful hands may have renewed the design, whilst, of course, the more enduring iron would still retain its ancient charm of form unimpaired.

The gracefulness and bold curving and twisting of the metal-work that supports and upholds the sign of many an ancient coaching inn had a peculiar fascination for us, and frequently brought our pencil

into requisition to record their varied outlines and quaint conceits, that truly splendid specimen of the "Bell" at Stilton—about which I shall have more to say when we arrive there—especially delighting us. At the sign of a certain "White Hart" elsewhere we could not but imagine that the open iron-work above it in the shape of a heart was not accidental, but intended as a play on words in metal, if the expression may be allowed.

After Graveley the road plucked up a little spirit and the scenery improved, just as though it were doing its best to please us. At one point there suddenly opened a fine view to the left, reaching over a vast extent of country bounded by an uneven horizon of wooded hills—hills that showed as a long, low undulating line, deeply blue, but enlivened by touches of greeny-gold where the sunshine rested for a moment here and there; it was as if Nature in one of her lavish moods had washed the horizon over with a tint of ultramarine, "for who can paint like Nature?"—little she recks the quantity or the rarity of the hues she employs, miles upon miles oftentimes, and that for a mere transient effect! To our right also our charmed visions ranged over a wide expanse of wooded plain, so space-expressing in its wealth of distances, the blue of which made us realise the ocean of air that lay between us and the remote horizon, the reality of the invisible!

After the confined limits of the house-bound streets of town, our eyes positively rejoiced in the unaccustomed freedom of roving unrestrained over so much space—a sudden change from yards to

miles! I have found from experience what a relief it is for the eye to be able thus to alter its focus from the near to the far-away: the vision like the mind is apt to become cramped by not being able to take a broad view of things. I verily believe that the eyes are strengthened by having the daily opportunity of exercising their full functions; this may be a fanciful belief on my part, but I hold it and write advisedly.

Gradually, as we proceeded, our road widened out, and was bounded on either hand by pleasant grassy margins, that, had we been on a riding instead of a driving tour, would certainly have tempted us to indulge in a canter. These grassy margins used to form part of the hard, well-kept highway when there was room for four coaches abreast at one time thereon. I wonder whether these spare spaces will ever be utilised for cycle tracks?

What, I further wonder, would our ancestors—could they come back to life again, and travel once more along the old familiar roads—think of the new steel-steed, and what would they make of the following notice, appended to the sign of an old inn on the way, which we deemed worthy of being copied?—

Good Accommodation
and
Stabling
for
Cyclists and Motorists.

This brings to mind the truth that lies in the old Latin saying, *Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis.*

CHAPTER III

A gipsy encampment—A puzzling matter—Farming and farmers past and present—An ancient market-town—A picturesque bit of old-world architecture—Gleaners—Time's changes—A house in two counties—A wayside inn—The commercial value of the picturesque.

On one of the grassy wastes by the roadside, a sheltered corner overhung by branching elms, we espied a gipsy encampment. A very effective and pretty picture the encampment made with its belongings and green setting of grass and foliage. There were three brilliantly-coloured caravans drawn up in an irregular line and partly screening from view the same number of brown tents; in and out of caravans and tents sun-tanned and gay-kerchiefed children were noisily rampaging; from amidst the brown tents a spiral film of faint blue smoke lazily ascended, to be lost to sight in the bluer sky above; and to complete a ready-made picture, the gipsies' horses were tethered close at hand, grazing on the rough sward. Truly the gipsy is a picturesque personage, though I have to confess he is not much beloved in the country; yet I should regret to have him improved entirely away, for he does bring colour and the flavour of wild, free life on to the scene, well suiting the English landscape.

The gipsy, for reasons best known to himself, is apt to resent the advances of strangers, even when made in the most amiable manner. The artist, who, for the sake of his picturesqueness and paintable qualities, is inclined to overlook the gipsy's possible sins of commission on other people's property, finds it difficult to sketch him; for myself, I am content to "snap-shot" him photographically on passing by, as I did on this occasion; which proceeding, however, he was prompt to resent with some gruffly muttered exclamation, to which we chaffingly replied, in the blandest of voices, "But you know a cat may look at a king." Upon which he shouted after us, not in the politest of tones, "Yes, but a photograph machine ain't a cat, and I ain't a king, nohow," and we felt that after all the gipsy had the best of the skirmish in words. The gipsy is manifestly no fool, or, with so many enemies on all sides, he would hardly have held his own for so long, and be extant and apparently flourishing as he is to-day. "It's the gipsy against the world," as a farmer once remarked to me, "and bless me if the gipsy don't somehow score in the struggle."

As we passed by the encampment, the incense of burning wood, mingled with sundry savoury odours, came wafted our way on the quiet air, and it appeared to us that a gipsy's life in the summer time was a sort of continuous picnic, not without its charms. Such a charm it has indeed for some minds, that we have more than once on previous expeditions actually met imitations of the real article in the shape of lady and gentleman gipsies (the term truly seems

rather a misnomer), touring about in smartly turned-out caravans, driven by liveried coachmen. But all this seems to me far too respectable and luxurious to be quite delightful. The dash of Bohemianism about it is absurdly artificial; moreover, the coming of a caravan, both from its size and unfamiliar appearance, of necessity invites an amount of attention that is not always desirable, and is frequently very annoying. Speaking for myself, I must say that when I travel I endeavour to attract as little notice as possible; I go to observe, not to be observed. Still, every one to his taste. If I have not become a caravannist myself, it is certainly not from want of having the charms, real or imagined, of that wandering and expensive life on wheels instilled into me by a friend who owns a pleasure caravan, and has travelled over a goodly portion of southern England in it, though he had to confess to me, under close cross-examination, that there were certain "trifling" drawbacks connected with the amateur gipsy's life: first, there was the aforementioned unavoidable publicity that a large caravan entails; then there was the slow pace such a cumbrous conveyance imposes on you at all times; the heat of the interior caused by the sun beating on the exterior in hot summer days; to say nothing of having to go, at the end of a long day's journey, in search of camping ground for the night, entailing often a loss of time and a good deal of trouble before suitable quarters are found and permission to use them is obtained; besides this, there is stabling to secure, and a foraging expedition has to be

undertaken, hardly a pleasure should the weather be wet! Whilst a simple inn is all that the more modest and less encumbered driving-tourist needs.

As we proceeded on our way, our attention was presently arrested by something strange and quite novel to us: on the telegraph wires, that stretched forth in long lines by the roadside, were suspended numerous little square bits of tin, and this for a considerable distance. The bits of tin, as they were swayed about by the wind, made weird music on the wires. Had we chanced to have driven that way at night, and heard those sounds coming directly down from the darkness above, without being able to discover the cause, we should have been much mystified; indeed, some hyper-nervous people passing there in the dark, under the same circumstances of wind and weather, might have come to the conclusion that this portion of the Great North Road was haunted. Such reputations have been established from lesser causes.

We were at a loss to account for the strange arrangement, so we looked about for somebody to question on the subject, and to solve the mystery for us if possible. There was not a soul in sight on the road, far off or near; for that matter, there never is when wanted. However, another look around revealed a man at work in a field near by, and to him we went and sought for the information desired, and this is the explanation we received in the original wording: "What be them tin things for on the telegraph postes?" They were really on the wires, but I have long ago discovered that you

must not expect exactness from the average countryman. "Why, they be put there on account of the partridges. You see, the birds, when they be a-flying fast like, don't always see them wires, and lots of them gets hurt and killed by striking themselves against them. You know, sir, as how partridges is partridges, and has to be taken great care on; if the quality only took the same care of the poor working-man, we should be happy." The poor working-man, or labourer, in the present case did not appear very miserable or poorly clad, so we ventured to remark: "Well, you don't seem particularly unhappy anyhow." At the same moment a small coin of the realm changed ownership in return for the information imparted, and we went our way, and the man resumed his work, after promising to drink our very good healths that very night, and we saw no reason to doubt that the promise would be faithfully kept. The one thing you may positively rely upon the countryman doing, if you give him the opportunity, is "to drink your health."

I may note here that during my many chats with the English labourer, in different counties far apart from each other, I have found their chief complaint (when they have one and venture to express it) is not so much the lowness of their wage, or the hardness of their work, as the poorness of their dwellings. Even the farm-hand begins to expect something better than the too often cold, damp, and draughty cottages that for generations past, in some parts of the country more than others, his "rude forefathers" had to put up

with uncomplainingly, or otherwise. It seems to me that the best way of stopping the emigration from the country to the town is to make the country more attractive to the countryman by housing him better. "But cottages don't pay," as a landlord once informed me, and in this age it is difficult to make men enter into philanthropic enterprises—unless they return a certain *per cent!* A money-making generation likes to mix up philanthropy with profit — to do good openly and make it pay privately!

From the agricultural labourer upwards to the farmer, and from the farmer to the landowner, is an easy and natural transition. Now, since I commenced taking my holidays on the road several years ago, agricultural depression has, alas! gradually deepened, and my driving tours in rural England have brought me into frequent contact with both landowner and tenant farmer, and now and again with that sadly growing rarity the independent and sturdy yeoman who farms his own little freehold, perchance held by his ancestors for long centuries; with all of these I have conversed about the "bad times," and have obtained, I think, a fairly comprehensive view of the situation from each standpoint. Endeavouring, as far as is possible with fallible human nature, to take the unprejudiced position of a perfectly neutral onlooker—a position that has caused me in turn to heartily sympathise with each party — the conclusion that I have reluctantly come to is this, that unless a great war should be a disturbing factor in

the case—an ever-possible contingency, by the way—with cheapened ocean transit and competition with new countries, land in Old England will no longer produce a profit to the modern tenant as well as to the landlord, and pay big tithes besides. It must be borne in mind that the tenant farmer of to-day has progressed like the rest of the world. He needs must possess a certain capital, and no longer is he or his family content with the simple life or pleasures of his predecessors. His wife, son, and daughters will not work on the farm, nor superintend the dairy, as of old; they all expect, and I think rightly expect, in an age when Board School children learn the piano and other accomplishments, a little more refinement and ease. And if this be so, I take it that the only way to solve the difficulty of making the land pay is somehow to get back the disappearing yeoman: the pride of possession will alone ensure prosperous farming. A local saying, possibly pertinent to the question, was repeated to me one day by a large tenant farmer in the Midlands, who had lost by farming well. It runs thus:

> He who improves may flit,
> He who destroys may sit.

And much truth underlies the proverbs of the countryside. Now a yeoman would not have to "flit" for improving his freehold, and a man does not generally destroy his own.

Whilst our thoughts had been wandering thus, the dog-cart had kept steadily on its way, and our reverie was broken by finding ourselves in the

quaint old market-town of Baldock, driving down its spacious and sunny main street, which we noticed with pleasure was lined with trees, and bound by irregular-roofed buildings, mellowed by age into a delicious harmony of tints. Nature never mixes her colours crudely. I know no better study of colour harmonies than the weather-painting of a century-old wall, with its splashes of gold, and silver, and bronze lichen, its delicate greens and grays, its russets and oranges, and all the innumerable and indescribable hues that the summer suns and winter storms of forgotten years have traced upon its surface—hues blending, contrasting, and commingling, the delight of every true artist, and his despair to depict aright. With buildings age is the beautifier; even Tintern, with its roofless aisles and broken arches, could not have looked half as lovely in the full glory of its Gothic prime, when its walls were freshly set, its sculptures new, and traceries recently worked, as it looks now. No building, however gracefully designed, can ever attain the perfection of its beauty till Time has placed his finishing touches thereon, toning down this and tinting that, rounding off a too-sharp angle here, and making rugged a too-smooth corner there, adorning the walls with ivy and clinging creepers, and decorating the roof with lustrous lichen!

Baldock had such a genuine air of antiquity about it, with its ancient architecture and slumberous calm, so foreign to the present age, that we felt that without any undue strain upon the imagination we could picture ourselves as medieval travellers

arriving in a medieval market-town! Baldock does not suggest, as so many country towns unfortunately do, a bit of suburban London uprooted and dumped down in a distant shire. No, Baldock has somehow managed to retain its own characteristic individuality, and it pleases the lover of the picturesque past because of this. To the left of the broad roadway our eyes were charmed by the sight of a quaint group of ancient alms-houses, situated within a walled enclosure, through which wall a graceful archway gave entrance to the homes. Whilst we were admiring this pleasing specimen of old-time work, one of the inmates came out and invited us inside; but the interior, upon inspection, did not attract us as the exterior had done: the latter had not been spoilt by furniture or paper, or any other modern addition, to disturb its charming and restful harmony. The rooms looked comfortable enough, however, and the old body who showed us over declared that she was more than satisfied with her quarters,—even life in an alms-house could not affect her manifestly cheerful and contented disposition. A prince in a palace could not have looked more satisfied with his lot. Inscribed on a stone tablet let into the front of the building we read:

> Theis Almes Howses are
> the gieft of Mr Iohn Wynne
> cittezen of London Latelye
> Deceased who hath left a
> Yeareley stipend to everey
> poore of either howses to
> the Worldes End. September
> Anno Domini 1621.

And may the stipend be regularly paid to the poor "to the Worldes End," according to the donor's directions, and not be devoted to other and very different purposes, as sometimes has been the case elsewhere with similar gifts, under the specious pretext of changed times!

Judging from the date affixed to these alms-houses, they were standing just as they are now, looking doubtless a little newer, when Charles I. passed a prisoner through here in the charge of General Fairfax; on which occasion, according to long-cherished local tradition, the vicar offered him for his refreshment some wine in the Communion cup. That must have been an eventful day for Baldock.

Not only the alms-houses, but the other buildings round about, of red brick, with the pearly-gray bloom of age over them, were very pleasant to look upon. Perhaps their colour never was so crude and assertive as that of the modern red brick with which we construct our cheap misnamed Queen Anne villas —which have nothing of the Queen Anne about them,—a red that stares at you, and is of one uniform, inartistic hue—a hue quite on a par as regards unsightliness with the chilly, eye-displeasing blue of Welsh slates. Since the railways have come and cheapened communication, Welsh slates have spread over all the land like an ugly curse; you find them everywhere—they have displaced the cheerful ruddy tiles that so well suit the gentle gloom of the English climate and the soft green of its landscapes, they have ousted the pleasant gray stone slab and homely

thatch. Welsh slates are bad enough, but, alas! there is even a lower depth of ugliness. Corrugated iron is still more hideous, and this I sadly note is coming into use as a roofing material; it is cheap and effectual, absolutely waterproof—and such an eyesore! How is it that things are so seldom cheap and beautiful—truly there are exceptions, but these only prove the rule—are these two qualities sworn enemies? If only the Welsh slates were of the delicious greeny-gray tint of the more expensive Cumberland ones, it would be a different matter. It is an astonishing thing how even good architects are neglectful of colour in their buildings, and what comparatively small thought they devote to the beauty of the roof.

Many people possibly would see nothing to admire or commend in Baldock; it would probably impress the average individual as being a sleepy, old-fashioned sort of place, deadly dull, and wholly devoid of interest; so doubtless the same individual would consider Stratford-on-Avon, had not Shakespeare been born there, and had not that magic accident of his birth caused the town to be visited and written about by famous authors, its beauties sought out and belauded by guide-book compilers, its quaint old-world bits of architecture to be sketched and painted and photographed endlessly, so that we all know how to admire it. Now, so far as I am aware, no very notable person has been born at Baldock, so the tourist comes not thither; and with nothing eventful to chronicle about the town, nothing to commend it but its quiet natural-

ness and picturesqueness, which it shares with many another ancient English market-town, Baldock will have to sleep on unfamed, for its quiet charms are not of the nature to assert themselves or appeal to everybody. There is a beauty that requires searching after, which, not being pronounced, the eye needs training to see. Still, I think that even the most unobservant traveller, on passing through the quiet little town, must note its pleasing look of mellowness and naturalness, the latter of which qualities is attractively refreshing in this age of artificiality.

Out of Baldock our road rose gradually on an embankment, possibly one of the later improvements made by the old Turnpike Trust, when there was actually a feeling amongst the coach proprietors that they might successfully compete with the coming iron horse—an idea that took some time to dispel, for even as late as October 1837 I find, from an old coaching poster so dated, that the "Red Rover" from London to Manchester was re-established as a commercial speculation. How long this "well-appointed coach" ran after its establishment I cannot say.

From the top of the rise we obtained a good view of Baldock, that, with the woods around, the silvery sheen of water below, and the soft sky above, made a very pretty picture; so pretty, indeed, that the temptation to sketch it was not to be resisted. But later on we had to harden our hearts and pass by many a picturesque spot without using our pencil, otherwise we should have made more sketches than

miles per hour, and our journey would not have been finished by Christmas time. To the artist eye, accustomed to look out for beauty, rural England is one succession of pictures!

We now struck upon a purely farming country, where the fields were large and divided by hedge-rows into a sort of glorified and many-tinted chess-board—not a happy comparison certainly, but "'twill serve." In some of the fields we saw gleaners, women and children, at work amongst the stubble, —I had nearly written at play, so unlike work did their occupation seem, for the children were romping, and the women were laughing and chatting, and it did our hearts good to hear the merry prattle and cheerful voices. Would all labour were as lightsome!

We had an idea that the gleaner, like the almost forgotten flail, was a thing of the past, but were delighted to find that the good old custom, honoured by over two thousand years of observance, sung of by poets and beloved by painters, has not wholly disappeared, and that some of the romance of the fields is left to us. The flail, that used to knock out the corn on the old barn floors with much thumping, I have not met with for years long past, but I believe, from what I hear, that it still is used in a few remote places. The reaping machine has driven the slow sickle into a few odd corners of the land, where the ground is rough and the crops are small, though sometimes it has momentarily re-appeared elsewhere when the corn has been badly laid. The mowing machine also has to a great

extent, though less universally, taken the place of the scythe. And with these changes has come a change over the sounds of the countryside. For the occasional whetting of the scythe we have the continuous rattle of the machine; and the puffing and peculiar humming of the steam-thresher, heard from afar, has taken the place of the muffled thumping of the flail on the soft straw, only to be heard a short way off.

The fact cannot be blinked that husbandry has lost not a little of its past-time picturesque and poetic aspect. Perhaps no one realises this more than the artist; for though it may be done, and has been done, yet for all it is not easy to put romance into commonplace machinery—that means poetry without the gathered glamour of the associations of long years. Machinery has at last but too successfully invaded the farm, and the agriculturist is being slowly converted into a sort of produce manufacturer. Now it is difficult to grow sentimental over machinery! The time may even come when the readers of Crabbe, Gray, Thomson, and other poets of the countryside will need the aid of a commentator to understand their terms aright. Only the other day a literary man asked me to describe a flail, as he was not quite sure what it was! Possibly some of us hardly realise how rapidly "the old order gives place to the new," till unexpectedly the fact is brought to mind by some such question. I am thankful to say that I have heard nothing of the "Silo" of late, so that I trust that ensilage, that was to do such great things for the English farmers, is a

failure, and never likely to usurp the place of the pleasant hay-field and fragrant haystacks. We simply cannot afford to improve the merry haymaking away —it is the very poetry of toil.

Driving on, we presently passed the fortieth milestone from London, just beyond which a post by the roadside informed us that we had entered Bedfordshire. Crossing this imaginary line brought back to mind a story we had been told concerning it by an antiquarian friend, as follows:—Just upon the boundaries of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire formerly stood a rambling old farm-house; the living-room of this was long and low, and on the centre beam that went across the ceiling (such as may still be found in ancient buildings) was inscribed this legend: "If you are cold, go to Hertfordshire" —which apparently inhospitable invitation was explained by the fact of the peculiar situation of the room, one-half being in the one county and one-half in the other, and it chanced that the fireplace was at the Hertfordshire end!

Soon after the change of counties, at the foot of a long gradual descent, we found ourselves in the hamlet of Astwick, where by the wayside we espied a primitive but picturesque little inn boasting the title of "The Greyhound," with a pump and horse-trough at one side, as frequently represented in old pictures and prints of ancient hostelries — a trough of the kind in which Mr. Weller the elder so ignominiously doused the head of the unfortunate Mr. Stiggins. Besides the trough there was a tiny garden of colourful flowers in front of the

inn by way of refinement, and above the weather-tinted roof uprose a fine stack of clustering chimneys. The chance light and shade effect of the moment suited well the unpretending but pleasant bit of old-time architecture, so we proceeded to photograph it, not, however, before the landlord had divined our intention, and had placed himself in a prominent position, so that he might be included in the picture. A worthy man the landlord proved to be, as we found out in after conversation with him, and we promised to send him a copy of the photograph; but "the best-laid schemes o' mice an'" amateur photographers "gang aft agley," for it happened we had forgotten to change the plate, and so took the old inn right on the top of a previous photograph of another inn, and the photographic mixture was not favourable to clearness or an artistic result! The negative when developed showed two sign-boards on separate posts in different positions and at different angles, two roofs, one just over the other, a hopeless jumble of windows, and two stacks of chimneys occupying the same place at the same time, in spite of the well-known axiom that no two things can do so. The Astwick landlord truly was there, but converted into a veritable ghost, for through his body you could plainly trace the door-way of the first inn! Certainly the result amused sundry of our friends, but then the photograph—photographs, I mean,—were not taken for that pur-pose, and friends are so easily amused at one's failings! This reminds me that a famous artist once told me, speaking of experiments in painting,

that he preferred a magnificent failure to a poor success ; but our failure was not magnificent.

Having, as we fondly imagined, secured a fine photograph, we entered into a conversation with the landlord, which resulted, as we hoped, in his inviting us to "take a glance" inside, where he pointed out the floors to us, which he said were all of "heart of oak," and further remarked, "You don't find that in modern buildings of this sort"—a statement in which we heartily concurred. He also showed us the staircase, likewise of oak. He had not been in the house long, we learnt, and when he bought the place "it was all going to ruin"; but he put it in good order. "Lots of people come to sketch and photograph the old inn, and some of the people who come patronise us for refreshment." So it would seem that, after all, the picturesque has a commercial value — a fact we were delighted to note. Who would go even a mile to sketch a modern-built public-house? for the primitive inn was really that, though its picturesque and thought-out design suggested a more dignified purpose.

CHAPTER IV

Biggleswade—"Instituted" or "intruded"!—A poetical will—The river Ivel—A day to be remembered—The art of seeing—Misquotations—The striving after beauty—Stories in stone—An ancient muniment chest—An angler's haunt—The town bridge—The pronunciation of names—St. Neots.

Some three miles or so beyond Astwick we reached high ground, from which we had extensive views to the right over miles of fields and undulating greenery. Shortly after this we dropped down into the drowsy old town of Biggleswade; at least it struck us as being a very drowsy sort of place when we were there, but doubtless it wakes up to a little life and movement once a week, on market-days. Even the Biggleswade dogs looked sleepily inclined, curled up under the shelter of various doorways, hardly indeed condescending to give us a glance as we passed by; whilst the nature of dogs generally is to make the arrival of a stranger in their parts an excuse to rush out and bark at him, good-naturedly or the reverse as the mood moves them. A dog seems to reason with himself, "Barking is the chief pleasure of life; here comes a stranger, let's have a bark!"

Here we drove into the ancient and rambling stable-yard of an old inn near the market-place, and

handed our horses over to the good keeping of the ostler; and whilst our lunch was being prepared we wandered out to have a look round the town, but found nothing to specially interest us, so all else failing, we sought the church. Even here we did not discover much to reward us, though the open and carved timber roof of the south aisle was good, with its ornamental bosses and corbels formed of sculptured figures of angels, the whole being more or less decayed and the worse for age. On the woodwork are some slight remains of decorative painting.

Placed against the wall of the church we observed a board with the following heading—"The Vicars of Biggleswade," followed by a list of names of the said vicars, "from 1276 to the present time, with the dates of their Institution." Glancing down the long list of names, after each we noticed the word "instituted," followed by the date thereof; but when we came to that of William Raulius, we noted instead of the usual "instituted," the suggestive word and date "intruded 1658" was inserted!

Of this church my *Paterson's Roads*, that does duty as a sufficient guide-book for us, remarks: "This substantial ancient edifice was built in the year 1230; it was formerly collegiate, and still contains several of the stalls. The parishioners have all an equal right to any of the seats, for which privilege, however, they are constrained to repair or rebuild the fabric when requisite." Under the heading of "Biggleswade," the same excellent road-companion also remarks of Sutton Park, near by, on the road to Potton, "It is traditionally stated that this seat

formerly belonged to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who gave it to Roger Burgoyne, ancestor of the present proprietor, by the following laconic grant :—

I, John of Gaunt,
Do give and do grant,
Unto Roger Burgoyne,
And the heirs of his loin,
Both Sutton and Potton,
Until the world's rotten.

There is also a moated site in the park, still known by the name of John of Gaunt's Castle."

Leaving Biggleswade, we crossed the river Ivel, but until the crossing thereof we had no idea that there was a river of such a name in England,—a driving tour is certainly helpful to a better and more minute knowledge of the geography of one's own land. Then we entered upon a far-reaching level stretch of country, with a great expanse of sunny sky above, and the silvery sheen of stilly waters showing below in slothful river and clear but stagnant dyke. We could trace our road for miles ahead in curving lines lessening to the low horizon, inclining first this way and then that, now disappearing, to reappear again a long way off. The eye—the artistic eye at any rate—rejoices in such a succession of sinuous curves, as much as it abhors the dictatorial and monotonous straight line; it likes to be led by gentle and slow degrees into the heart of the landscape, and away beyond into the infinity of space where the vague distance vanishes into the sky. Possibly the muscles of the eye more readily

adapt themselves to such easy and gradual transition from spot to spot than to the harsher insistence of a straight line. Nature herself hardly ever indulges in the latter; man may make it, but she, in time, on every opportunity, mars it gloriously.

On either hand, as we drove on, stretched a level land of tilled fields and verdant meadows, the many colours of the crops and the varied greens of the pastures forming a gigantic mosaic. To the right of us rose some rounded fir-crowned hills, if hills be the right term, for only perhaps in a flat country would such modest elevations be dignified with the title of hills. These, to employ a familiar painter's expression, "told" deeply blue—with all the beauty of ultramarine and all the depth of indigo.

It was an open breezy prospect, delightful to gaze upon, though there was nothing exciting or grand about it save the great distances and the wide over-arching sky; but it had the charm of wonderful colouring, and was full of lightness and brightness that was most inspiriting; full of cheery movement too, where the wild wind made rhythmic waves of the long grasses and unreaped fields of corn, and rustled the leaves and bent the topmost branches of the saplings before its gentle blasts, or where it rippled the gliding waters of the winding river and silvery streams, causing them to glance and sparkle in the flooding sunshine. All Nature seemed buoyant with an exuberant vitality upon that almost perfect afternoon, and the gladness of the hour entered into our very souls and made us exultant accordingly! It was a day to call fondly back to

mind when pent up in London during the darksome and dreary November days, half asphyxiated with the smoke and sulphur laden atmosphere; then the very remembrance of such a time of golden sunshine and fresh and fragrant breezes is of untold refreshment.

Some people might have deemed that prospect, composed chiefly of flat fields, sluggish waters, and scattered trees, uninteresting and unbeautiful, with nothing to commend it, still less to rave about; but there is such a thing as the art of seeing, which art reveals, to those who cultivate it, beauty in the most unexpected places. The charm of form and colour is often a noteworthy factor that makes for beauty in a prospect that is devoid of the picturesque and the "sweetly pretty." The best training in the art of seeing and discovering beauty that I know is to make a series of sketches from Nature, in colour—water-colour for preference, as being clearer of tint and easier applied. Take, for instance, a bit of an old stone wall, or, better still, a weather-stained boulder on some moor, outline it as well as you can —never mind the drawing at first, it is the colour you must look for—copy these tint for tint, hue for hue, as faithfully as you can. Before starting you may imagine that the rugged boulder is simply gray all over, lighter on the side where the sun shines, and darker in the shadows, and that is all; but as you try to represent its surface you will soon discover, if you only look hard and carefully enough, that what you at first deemed to be merely a mass of gray is composed of a myriad changeful colours:

there are sure to be the silver, and the gold, and perchance the red, of clinging lichen (glorious colours these); then there are the greens of mosses, and countless weather-stains here and there, all to be given; then the rock itself, you will perceive as the eye gets more accustomed to its novel task, is composed of countless tints, changing with almost every change of surface, and where the boulder lies half in shadow you will perceive a sort of blue-gray bloom—look very hard for this; then the blackest shadows, you will note, are rich and deep, and look quite colourful beside any single tint you may mix in the hope of representing them. The more you study that boulder, the more colour you will see in it; and if all this unexpected colour exists in one simple rock, to leave the charms of varying form unconsidered, what must there not exist on the whole wide moor? Look for yourself and see. After your eye has had its first lesson in the art of seeing and searching out the beautiful, it will naturally, unconsciously almost, begin to look for it everywhere —and expect it! I fear I have perhaps written this in too didactical a manner, but I find it difficult to express myself clearly otherwise, and must plead this as my excuse for a failing I find it so hard to endure in others.

It was sketching from Nature that first taught me to look for and find beauties in my everyday surroundings that before I had never even imagined to exist. This art of seeing came to me like a new sense—it was a revelation, and it has ever since afforded me so much positive and lasting pleasure,

that I can truly say it has materially increased the happiness of my life. Surely if "a man who can make two blades of grass grow where one grew before is a benefactor to his race," to add, however slightly, to the happiness of life is to be a benefactor too, humble though the addition may be.

Now, after this over-long digression, let us once more resume the even tenor of our tour. I had nearly written the even tenor of our way, and placed the words between inverted commas, so familiar does the saying sound; but I find on reference that Gray really wrote "the noiseless tenor of their way," which is not exactly the same thing, and it is as well to be correct in small details as in great. It is astonishing to me how often familiar quotations go wrong in the quoting; indeed, it is rather the exception to find them rightly given. I have only just to-day come across two instances of this whilst glancing over a magazine article. First I note that Milton's "fresh woods and pastures new" is rendered, as it mostly is, "fresh fields and pastures new"; then Nathaniel Lee's "when Greeks joined Greeks, then was the tug of war" is misquoted, as usual, "when Greek meets Greek," etc., quite losing the point that when the ancient—not the modern! —Greeks were joined together they were a doughty foe. But now I am wandering again right off the road!

Driving on, we presently crossed the little river Ivel by a gray stone bridge, beneath which the stream ran clear and brightly blue. Across the bridge we found ourselves in the straggling village

of Girtford. This began well with pretty cottages roofed with homely thatch; then passing a wayside public-house with the uncommon title of "The Easy Chair" (a sign that we do not remember to have met with before), the village ended badly, in a picturesque point of view, with a row of uninteresting cottages of the modern, square-box type, shelters for man rather than habitations—commonplace, alas! and unsightly. The sudden contrast from the old to the new was an object-lesson in ancient beauty and modern ugliness.

The progressive nineteenth century, by the mean and hideous structures it has erected over all the pleasant land, has done much towards the spoliation of English scenery. It has done great things, truly. It has created railways, it has raised palaces, mansions, huge hotels, monster warehouses, tall towers, and gigantic wheels of iron; but it has forgotten the way of rearing so simple and pleasing a thing as a home-like farmstead; it cannot even build a cottage grandly. Yet how well our ancestors knew how to do these. Still, the wanderer across country now and then sees signs of better things, a promise of a return to more picturesque conditions, and this sometimes in the most out-of-the-way and unexpected quarters. Thus, during our drive, have we chanced upon a quaint and freshly-painted inn sign done in a rough but true artistic spirit, supported by wrought-iron work of recent date, worthy of the medieval craftsman; and in quiet market-towns and remote villages have our eyes occasionally been delighted by bits of thoughtful archi-

tecture, the outcome of to-day, with their gable fronts, mullioned windows, and pleasant porches, in reverent imitation of what is best in the old. Besides these, sundry restorations of ancient buildings backwards, not forwards, point to a striving again for beauty.

An excellent and most delightful example of the revival of picturesque village architecture we discovered the other year when driving through Leigh, near Tunbridge, where the modern cottages are all pictures, charming to look upon with their half-timber framework, thatched roofs of the true Devon type, many gables, big chimneys, and quaint porches —all modern, but imbued with the spirit and poetry of the past. It is as though a medieval architect had been at work on them. The simple cottages are nobly designed; there is no starving of material in the attempt to make the utmost of everything; they are all humble abodes, yet dignified; a millionaire might live in one and not be ashamed; and withal they are essentially English. If they have a failing, it is perhaps that they look a trifle artificial —too suggestive of the model village or of stage scenery; but this I take it arises mainly because we are not accustomed in these commonplace days to find poetry out of books and paintings, so that the coming suddenly upon it realised in bricks and mortar strikes one for the moment as strange and unreal.

After another stretch of wide, open country, flushed with air and suffused with sunshine, the hamlet of Tempsford was reached. By the roadside

A WAYSIDE INN.

here stood the ancient fane, gray and dusky with years. Its door was unfastened, so we stepped inside. Our hoary churches are stories in stone, to those who can read them; though not always is the reading easy, or the story complete. The first thing on entering that attracted our attention was an unusually fine medieval muniment chest, its age uncertain, but without doubt centuries old. It had evidently been cut out of the solid trunk of a tree (presumably of an oak). The chest is now much worm-eaten, and is bound round with many broad iron bands, and further secured by five locks. They had great faith in big locks in those days—locks with twisted key-holes, though to the modern mind they look easy enough to pick. The problem that presented itself to us was, seeing that about two-thirds of the wood was interlaced with these metal bands, why was not the chest at the start made wholly of iron? In this case the bands promise to outlast the worm-eaten and decaying wood they enclose, though in some old chests of a similar nature the iron has rusted more than the wood has perished, possibly owing to atmospheric conditions, for dampness would probably destroy the iron quicker than the wood, and dryness would reverse these conditions.

At the west end of the north aisle we observed a curious triangular window, and in the pavement at the base of the tower we found two flat tombstones a little apart. One is inscribed in Latin to the memory of "Knightley Chetwode," and the other in English to his wife, who, we learnt, was noted for her "piety towards God, fidelity to the King and the

Protestant succession"; though why the virtues of the husband should be set forth in Latin and those of his wife in English I do not quite see.

On the wall of the tower we also noted the following inscription cut in a stone slab, the exact import of which was not very clear to us; possibly it related to some rebuilding :—

Will̄ Savnderson Gē
and Thom̄ Staplo Yēo
Overseers of this New
Work & patentyes of his
Maiesties Letters
Patent Granted for
the same May xii—1621.

The lettering of this was delightfully full of character, and pleasing to look upon simply for the forms of the letters—a something quite apart from the mechanical precision with which the present-day engravers render their works, possibly because they cannot do otherwise; it does not require much thought to be simply precise!

Just beyond Tempsford our road came close to the side of the quiet-flowing Ouse, and there, where for a space the road and river ran together, stood an inviting and picturesque inn, whose sign was that of "The Anchor." An ideal angler's haunt it seemed to us as we passed by, with an old punt and boats close inshore, and shady trees overhanging the gleaming stream. There was a look of homely repose about the spot quite incommunicable in words, a beauty about the fresh greens and silvery grays of the wind-stirred foliage to be felt, not described.

And how deep and rich were the luscious reflections where the woods doubled themselves in the glassy flood! How peace-bestowing it all was! We would, for the moment, that we were simple fishermen, and that this were our journey's end! Great was the temptation to stop and laze a while, but we resisted it and drove on. We feared, perhaps, though we did not confess this to ourselves, that too close an inspection might rob us of our pleasant impressions. We had an ideal, and wished to keep it! There is an art in knowing how much to leave unseen!

On now we drove, through a land of broad and luxuriant meadows, cool and tree-shaded, till we reached Eaton Socon, a pretty village with a small green and a fine large church. Within the sacred edifice we discovered little of interest, only portions of a rather good timber roof, a carved oak screen of fair workmanship, and the remains of a squint blocked up. If there were anything else noteworthy we managed very successfully to miss it.

Then a short stretch of road brought us once more to the blue winding Ouse; at least it looked very blue that day. This we crossed on an ancient, time-worn bridge, that had great recessed angles at the sides wherein pedestrians might retreat and watch the long track of the glimmering river, and dream day-dreams, should they be so minded, safely out of the way of road traffic, and undisturbed by the passing and repassing of those afoot. On the other side of the river we found ourselves *at once* in the wide market-place of St. Neots. At the bridge

the country ended and the town began; there were no straggling suburbs to traverse. Close at hand, right in the market-place, we caught sight of an inviting hostelry, the "Cross Keys" to wit. The first glance at the old inn was enough to decide us in its favour. Relying on the instinct begotten of long years of road travel, we had no hesitation in directly driving under the archway thereof, where we alighted in the courtyard, and sought and obtained, just what we then mostly needed, comfortable quarters for the night. In the case of the selection of an hostelry, we had learnt to judge by outside appearances, in spite of the proverb to the contrary effect. Even in proverbs there are exceptions to the rule!

I should imagine, from the glance we had on passing over, that the bridge at St. Neots forms a sort of outdoor club for a number of the townsfolk. There is something magnetic about a river that equally attracts both the young and the old; it is bright and open, it has the charm of movement, and there is nearly always life of some kind to be found by the waterside. Thither, too, at times the fisherman, or at any rate the fisher-urchin, comes; and what a fascination there is for most minds in watching an angler pursuing his sport, even though in vain! I have frequently observed that in country towns where there is a widish river and a convenient bridge over it, there on that bridge do certain of the citizens regularly congregate at evening-time, when the day's work is done, for a chat, a quiet smoke, and "a breath of air before turning in." The town

bridge has become quite an institution in some places!

As we went out to do a little shopping, we were amused and instructed to hear the different ways that the natives pronounced the name of their town. One would have imagined that there was only one way of doing this, but we discovered three: the first party we conversed with distinctly called it St. Notes, a second as emphatically declared it to be St. Nots, and still another would have it St. Neets, whilst we as strangers had innocently pronounced it as spelt; and now I do not feel at all certain as to which is the prevailing local appellation, or if there may still be another variety.

Our bedroom window faced the old market-square—a large, open, and picturesque space, pleasant to look upon; and at the window we sat for a time watching the life of the place and the odd characters coming and going. It was all as entertaining to us as a scene in a play, and a good deal more so than some, for there was no indifferent acting in our players, and no false drawing in the background—the perspective was perfect! And, as we watched, the light in the west gradually faded away, whilst the moon rose slowly and shone down, large and solemn, through the haze that gathered around when the dusk descended. The gentle radiance of the moonlight made the mist luminous with a mellow light—a light that lent the magic charm of mystery to the prospect. The houses, grouped irregularly round the square, were indistinctly revealed, all their harsher features being softened down; then one

after another lights gleamed forth from their many-paned windows, with a warm yellow cheerfulness in marked contrast with the cold silvery moonshine without. The mist-damped roadway was reflective, and repeated vaguely the yellow gleams above, and imparted to the scene quite a Turneresque effect. Above the low-roofed houses, dimly discernible, rose the tall tower of the stately parish church, so grand a church that it has earned the epithet of "the cathedral of Huntingdon." It was a poetic vision, very beautiful and bewitching to look upon, we thought; but, after all, much of the beauty in a prospect lies in the imaginative qualities of the beholder: we may all see the same things, yet we do not see them in the same manner!

CHAPTER V

The charm of small towns—The Ouse—A pleasant land—Buckden Palace—A joke in stone—The birthplace of Samuel Pepys—Buried treasure—Huntingdon—An old-time interior—A famous coaching inn—St. Ives—A church steeple blown down!—A quaint and ancient bridge—A riverside ramble—Cowper's country—Two narrow escapes.

One of the special charms of small towns like St. Neots is that you can readily walk out of them in any direction right into the country; and what a boon it must be to the inhabitants of such places to have the real country all around them, easily accessible even to children, and this without having to take to cab or railway! So next morning, after starting early, as was our wont, we soon found ourselves amongst the green fields and trees again. It was a bright sunshiny day, with a fleecy sky above and a brisk breeze below—the very weather for driving.

Just outside St. Neots we came to a gateway on the road with the gate closed and barring our path; there was, however, a man at hand to open it, and a very prominent notice-board facing us inscribed—"The man who attends to the common-gate is not paid any wage, and is dependent upon the free gifts of the public." This notice struck us as being

somewhat novel, practically converting the gate into a toll-gate, for the moral obligation to tip was thereby made manifest—and why should gates be allowed on the main highways?

After this we crossed a long open common, at the farther end of which we passed through still another gate, that also needed another tip for the opening thereof; then we came to our old friend the Ouse again, which we crossed on a bridge by the side of a mill; just before reaching this we noticed that there was a raised causeway approach to the bridge for pedestrians above and alongside of the road, suggestive of winter flooding. The causeway also suggested an excellent motive for a picture with suitable figures on it, to be entitled "When the river is in flood." It would form quite a Leaderesque subject, taken at a time when the day is waning, and wan yellow lights are in the sky, and a yellow sheen lies on the stream.

The Ouse here is very pretty, clear-watered, and gentle-gliding, fringed with reedy banks and overhung by leafy trees, the whole being rich in colour and broad in effect. Indeed, the Ouse is a very pleasant, lazy stream, and a most sketchable one too. The discovery of the picturesqueness of this river—of which more anon—was one of the unexpected good things of our journey.

Now our road led us, with many windings, through a pleasant land of parks and park-like meadows, wherein grew great branching elms, beneath whose grateful shelter the meek-eyed cattle gathered complacently. It was an essentially peace-

ful, homelike country, green and slumberous, but wanting wide views; a closed-in landscape, however beautiful of itself, becomes a trifle monotonous in time—you can even have a monotony of beauty—the eye loves to rake the countryside, to get a peep, now and then, of the blue far-away, or of the gray outline of a distant hill.

The first village on our way was Buckden, and here, being unprovided with a guide-book, we had a delightful surprise, for as we entered the place we caught a glimpse of the broken and time-worn towers of a large, rambling, and picturesque pile of buildings, some portions ruined, others apparently maintained and occupied. The structure was principally of brick, but time-toned into a warmish gray with age. What could it be? Manifestly, from its extent, it was a place of considerable importance. Such surprises are happily to be expected in such a storied land as England, wherein you cannot travel far without setting your eyes upon some ancient history. In spite of the size and beauty of the many-towered building, when we asked ourselves what it could be, we had sadly to acknowledge that even the name of Buckden was unfamiliar to us! So we consulted our ancient and faithful *Paterson* to see what he might say, and running our finger down the line of road, as given in the "London to Carlisle" route, we read after the name of the village, "Bishop of Lincoln's Palace." A note by the side, giving some details thereof, says: "This venerable pile is chiefly constructed of brick, and partly surrounded by a moat; it comprises two quadrangular courts, with a

square tower and entrance gateway, and contains several spacious apartments. Large sums of money have been expended by different prelates on this fabric, particularly by Bishops Williams and Sanderson, the former in the reign of James I. and the latter in that of Charles II. The situation of the edifice is extremely pleasant. The manor was granted to the see of Lincoln in the time of Henry I. . . . Several of the prelates belonging to this see have been interred in the parish church."

We gathered from this that probably the church would be fine and interesting, so we alighted and made our way thither. Facing the quiet God's acre —I would like to write God's garden, but it was hardly that—stood one of the square, semi-fortified gateways of the palace, embattled on the top, and having four octagonal flanking towers at its sides; in the enclosed walls below were mullioned windows, the stonework of which was perfect, but the glass was gone; at the foot of the gateway commanding the approach were cross arrow-slits, presumably placed there for ornament—a survival of past forms that, even when the tower was raised, had long outlived their uses, so strong is the strength of tradition. Thus to-day I know instances where the modern architect of renown has introduced buttresses when the wall is strong enough without; peaceful church towers are likewise embattled like a feudal castle keep, and gargoyles introduced thereon, where, did the latter only carry out their offices, they would pour the rain-water down in streams upon the heads of the

congregation when entering or leaving the building! So, their true functions gone, are obsolete forms retained for the sake of their picturesqueness, which seems wrong art to me; rather should we attempt to build for the needs of the present, and make those needs ornamental—to construct soundly, and be content to adorn such construction. The architects of old, I trow, did not introduce gargoyles for the sake of ornament; they made them to throw the rain from off their roofs and walls, purely for utility; then they proceeded to carve and make them presentable, and converted an ugly excrescence into a thing of beauty or quaintness, as the spirit moved them, but either way they were interesting. Now that we have invented rain-water pipes—which, let it be frankly owned, answer the purpose far better than the old-fashioned gargoyles—we should seek, in the spirit of the past, to make beautiful or quaint the headings of the same. Here is a sadly neglected and legitimate opportunity to introduce the much-needed decoration that *does* decorate, and thus add an interest to our houses they so much need. Instead of this, we are too often content with "stuck on" ornaments, which do not ornament, serve no need, and merely profit the builder's pocket.

But to return to the old Buckden Palace gateway. Though externally the brick and stone work is in fair condition, the structure is but a skeleton; however, this fact adds to its picturesqueness, and with the better-preserved towers beyond, it helps to form a very pleasing group. When we were there the ruined tower was in the possession of a flock of

noisy starlings—birds that strangely appear to prefer buildings to trees, and who made themselves much at home in the ruins.

Then we took a glance within the church, where several Bishops of Lincoln lie buried close to their palatial home. Fortunate beings those ancient bishops —to make the best of both worlds, and to ensure so many earthly good things on their way to heaven ; to be the servant of Him who had not where to lay His head, and yet to sit on a throne, live in a palace, and enjoy a princely income ; nevertheless, to talk of losing all for Christ, who said, "My kingdom is not of this world"! Strangely inconsistent is the creed of Christianity with the history of the Church. "Love your enemies" was the command of the Master. "Torture and burn them" was the order of the medieval Church—and is the servant greater than the Master ?

Buckden church, though interesting, was hardly so much so as might have been expected ; its open timber roof, however, was very fine, and was adorned with a series of sculptured angels that manifestly had once been coloured, but now had a faded look, and faded angels seem hardly appropriate ; moreover, not one of the number had his (or her ?) wings perfect ; some had only one wing, and that broken, others were in a still worse plight, having no wings at all ! But why should angels have wings ? Is it that neither scholar nor artist can get beyond anthropomorphism ? Wings are hardly spiritual appendages. The medieval craftsman, in representing angels so provided, must surely

have reasoned with himself somewhat in this fashion : Angels fly ; now all birds and creatures that fly have wings, therefore angels must have wings ; and so he added them to the human form, to represent a spirit. The medieval craftsman could invent demons — veritable monsters who breathed and struggled in wood and stone, and looked good-naturedly diabolical with leering, wicked eyes, yet hardly dreadful — monsters that appeared quite possible in some other and most undesirable world— these were pure creations, but his angels were simply winged humanity, neither original nor interesting, for their even placid features, if without guile, were equally without character.

The roof was supported by stone corbels, that in turn supported carved oak figures of mitred bishops, from which sprang the great rafters with the angels on. One of these corbels was most cleverly carved so as to represent a roundish head with a hand held over one eye in a very roguish way, and tears running down the cheek from the other ; the expression of the features, one half merry and the other grieved, was marvellous, especially the mouth, part jocund and part miserable ; it was an odd conceit that compelled one to laugh, the comicality was irresistible. Were I to worship in that church, I am afraid that the most serious sermon would hardly affect me with that droll face peering grinningly down—one half at least—and looking so knowing ! A carved joke ! That is art in truth that converts the amorphous stone into a thing of life, with the expressions of grief and joy. Compare such living

work with the lumpy, inexpressive, and meaningless stone-carving that disfigures so many of our modern churches built "to the glory of God" cheaply and by contract, and how great and distressing the contrast!

As we drove out of Buckden, we noticed what a fine coaching inn it boasted once, namely the "George and Dragon." The original extent of the whole building, in spite of alterations, can still be easily traced; its former size and importance may be gathered from the fact that there are thirteen windows in one long line on its front, besides the great archway in the centre, that is such a prominent feature in most old-fashioned hostelries.

A couple of miles or so beyond Buckden stands the pretty village of Brampton, and here we made a short halt, as, besides its picturesqueness, Brampton had a further interest for us in being the birthplace of that celebrated Diarist and old-time road-traveller the worthy Mr. Samuel Pepys, who was born here on 23rd February 1632, though the event is not to be found in the parish register, for the excellent reason that "these records do not commence until the year 1654." I find in the preface to the new edition of *Lord Braybrooke's Diary of Samuel Pepys*, edited by H. B. Wheatley, it is stated: "Samuel Knight, D.D., author of the *Life of Colet*, who was a connection of the family (having married Hannah Pepys, daughter of Talbot Pepys of Impington), says positively that it was at Brampton" Pepys was born. The father and mother of the ever-entertaining Diarist lived and died at Brampton, and were buried there.

The number of birthplaces of famous Englishmen that we came accidentally upon during the course of our journey was a notable feature thereof. Besides the instance just mentioned, there was Cromwell's at Huntingdon, Jean Ingelow's at Boston, Sir John Franklin's at Spilsby, Lord Tennyson's at Somersby, Sir Isaac Newton's at Woolsthorpe, with others of lesser note, the last four being all in Lincolnshire.

But to return to Brampton. Pepys makes frequent mention of this place in his notes, and gives some very amusing and interesting experiences of one of his visits there under the date of the 10th and 11th of October 1667, when he came to search for and to recover his buried treasure. It appears, after the Dutch victory in the Thames, and the rumours that they intended to make a descent upon London, Pepys, with many others, became alarmed about the safety of his property, so he sent a quantity of gold coins in bags down to his father's home at Brampton, with instructions that they should be secretly buried in the garden for security! A primitive proceeding truly, giving a curious insight of the state of the times: one would have imagined that the money would really have been safer hidden in London than risked on the road, where robberies were not infrequent.

When all fear of the Dutch invasion had vanished, Pepys journeyed down to Brampton to get back his own, which caused him to moralise upon the obvious thus—"How painful it is sometimes to keep money, as well as to get it." Having

recovered his money, or nearly all of it, he relates how about ten o'clock he took coach back to London. "My gold I put into a basket, and set under one of the seats; and so my work every quarter of an hour was to look to see whether all was well; and I did ride in great fear all day." And small wonder, for if any of the "gentlemen of the road" had "got wind" of Mr. Pepys's exploit, it is more than probable that they would have eased him of his treasure; even without such knowledge, there was just a possibility of a misadventure at their hands. The only pleasant part of that memorable journey must have been the ending thereof. I wonder whether Mr. Pepys ever heard of the tradition, which has found its way as historic fact into some of our school-books, that "in Saxon times the highways were so secure that a man might walk safely the whole length and breadth of the land, with a bag of gold in his hand." The "in Saxon times," however, calls to my mind the inevitable beginning of the good old-fashioned fairy stories, "Once upon a time." Both terms are rather suggestive of romancing; at least they put back dates to a safely distant period!

On the church tower at Brampton, which stands close to the roadside, is the date 1635 plainly carved in stone, and to-day as sharp and clear as when first chiselled over two eventful centuries ago. From Brampton we drove to Huntingdon. About midway between those places we passed, on a triangular bit of green, a gray stone obelisk surmounted by a ball. At first we imagined that we had come across

another wayside monument, but it disappointed us, proving to be merely a glorified sign-post with hands pointing out the various directions, and the various distances given below. Then leaving, to our left, the historic home of Hinchinbrook, where the Protector spent some of his boyish days with his uncle and godfather Sir Oliver Cromwell, we soon entered the pleasant town of Huntingdon. Here we sought out the "George," one of the famous trio of coaching houses on the road that, with its namesake at Stamford and the "Angel" at Grantham, disputed the premier place for comfort, good living, and high charges. At either of these well-patronised hostelries our forefathers were sure of excellent fare and rare old port such as they delighted in: it was the boast of some of the hosts, in the prime of the coaching age, that they could set down before their guests better wine than could be found on His Majesty's table. If this were a fiction, it were a pleasant fiction; and tired travellers, as they sipped their old bottled port, after feasting well, doubtless deemed their landlord's boast no idle one.

Unfortunately the "George" at Huntingdon, unlike its two rivals aforementioned, has externally been rebuilt, not, alas! on the picturesque old lines, but in the square, commonplace fashion of plain walls pierced with oblong holes for windows—a fashion so familiar to us all. But upon driving beneath the archway and entering the courtyard, a pleasant surprise awaited us. We found a picture in building presented to our admiring gaze. It was one of those delightful experiences that are so delightful because

so unexpected: there is a wonderfully added charm about pleasures that are unanticipated. This is why it is so enjoyable to travel through a fresh country with all before you unknown and therefore pregnant with possibilities; the mind is thus kept ever in an agreeable state of expectancy, wondering what each new bend in the road may reveal; and what a special interest there lies in the little discoveries that one makes for oneself! Could a guide-book be produced giving particulars of all one would see on a tour, so that one would always know exactly what to expect everywhere, I make bold to say that a tour undertaken with such a perfect companion would not be worth the taking!

But to get back to the "George" at Huntingdon. There, straight in front of us, stood a goodly portion of the ancient inn, unlike the exterior, happily unmodernised—a fact for all lovers of the beautiful to be deeply grateful for. This bit of building retained its ancient gallery, reached by an outside stairway (so familiar in old prints and drawings of such inns), and in the great tiled roof above, set all by itself in a projecting gable, was the hotel clock, that doubtless erst did duty to show the time to a generation of road-travellers in the days before the despotic reign of the steam-horse, when corn and hay, not coal and coke, sustained the motive power.

This unchanged corner of a famous old coaching hostelry spoke plainly of the picturesque past. It was not a painter's dream, it was a reality! It suggested bits from *Pickwick*, and sundry scenes from novels of the out-of-date romantic school.

AN OLD COACHING INN: COURTYARD OF THE GEORGE, HUNTINGDON.

Indeed, it must formerly have been quite a Pickwickian inn, and in our mind's eye we conjured up a picture in which the immortal Sam Weller was the chief character, standing in the courtyard below flirting with the neat be-ribboned maids above as they leaned over the open gallery, when for a moment business was slack in the yard, and the chamber bells had a brief respite from ringing. The building and courtyard had a genuine old-world flavour about them that was very charming, and to add to its interest and attractiveness the building was not decayed or ruined, as so many of the kind are, but was well preserved and maintained, so that it must have looked to us much the same as it did in the days of our ancestors—peace be to their ashes!

At the "George" we were received by a motherly landlady with a welcoming smile, that made us feel more like an expected guest arriving than an utter stranger seeking food and shelter for a time; this ready greeting in the good old-fashioned style promptly recalled to memory Shenstone's famous and often-quoted lines as to the warmness of the welcome a traveller may find at an inn.

So much to our liking were both landlady and hostelry, that we forthwith determined to stop the night beneath the sign of the "George" at Huntingdon, though it was only then mid-day. "I really must make a sketch of your pretty courtyard!" I exclaimed to the landlady, after returning her greeting with thanks, for we were always most particular to repay courtesy with courtesy. "Oh! do

wait till to-morrow," she begged, "as you are staying on, for I have ordered some flowers and plants to put round about the yard. They will be here this afternoon, and the place will look so much nicer with them." So smilingly we consented to wait till to-morrow, when the flowers and shrubs would be in evidence. It was something to feel that so charming a relic of the past was thus prized and cared for. Picturesqueness begets picturesqueness; as a pretty house calls for tasteful things about it, so a picturesque bit of old building like this mutely begs for flowers and plants to complete its pleasantness.

As we had the whole afternoon on our hands, we determined to do a little local exploring. The only point to be considered was, in which direction we should go. To settle this our map was consulted, and from it we learnt that the ancient town of St. Ives was only, by rough scale measurement, some four to five miles off; moreover, we noted that our newly-made friend the Ouse flowed between the two towns with many a bend that suggested pleasant wanderings; and as we were informed that there was a footpath by the riverside, the wanderings were feasible. So we made up our minds to get to St. Ives somehow, by railway if needs be and a train served, and at our leisure to follow the winding stream afoot back to Huntingdon. We felt a strong desire to become better acquainted with the Ouse, as the few peeps we had already caught of its quiet beauties much impressed us; still, we had a haunting dread of being disappointed with a wider view, so often have

hopes raised in a similar manner proved illusive. Then we remembered Wordsworth's lines :

> Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown !
> It must, or we shall rue it !
> We have a vision of our own ;
> Ah ! why should we undo it !

Well, we had "a vision of our own" of what the Ouse would be like—"should we undo it ?" We had asked ourselves almost a similar question before of one picturesque spot by the same river's side near Tempsford, as may be remembered, but that was only of one special nook, not of a five miles' stretch of country !

We found St. Ives to be a drowsy, old-fashioned town, delightfully unprogressive, and little given to so-called modern improvements—a place where the feverish rush of life seemed stayed. It struck us as being quaint rather than picturesque, though its curious old bridge, hoary with antiquity, certainly deserved both these epithets, and bits of its buildings, here and there, proved eminently sketchable. Whilst we were drawing an odd gable which took our fancy, an elderly stranger approached and began to converse with us—a frequent incident under such circumstances, so much so that we had become quite accustomed to it. The stranger in this case turned out trumps, in that he was somewhat of a character, possessing a fund of entertaining information about local subjects that interested us. He was a quiet-spoken and pleasant-mannered man, rather shabbily dressed, as though he paid

little heed to the cut of his coat or external appearances, but his linen was scrupulously clean. We felt puzzled what position in the varied economy of life to assign to him, nor did any chance remarks of his help us in this respect. But, after all, who or what he might be was no business of ours. "Have you seen the old bridge yet?" was one of his first questions. Then he went on to say, "You must not miss that, it is the queerest bridge in England; it was constructed by the old monks originally; there's a curious building right in the middle of it, on the site of an ancient chapel in which prayers used to be offered up for the safety of travellers starting on a journey, and thanks were given for their safe arrival. When the chapel and priests were done away with, a lighthouse was put up in its place to help the river traffic, so I've been told; then the lighthouse got burnt down; and afterwards, when the people found that they could get along without either chapel or lighthouse, the place was converted into a dwelling-house, and that's what it is now. There's not many folk, I fancy, in these times, who have their home in the middle of a bridge! It is a wonderful old building, you must not miss it on any account," and we promised that we would not. "Then there's our church," he went on; "the spire of it has been blown down twice, though you might not think it on such a day as this; but it does blow terribly hard here at times: the wind comes up the river and sweeps down upon us in the winter, now and then, hard enough to take you off your legs. I've been blown down myself by it when crossing

the bridge. But I was going to tell you a strange bit of history connected with our church, which I believe is quite unique. Many years ago—I don't just now remember the exact date, but it was over two hundred years back—a Dr. Wilde left a sum of money in his will, the interest on which was to go to buy Bibles to be tossed for by dice on the Communion table by six boys and six girls of the parish, and the tossing still takes place every year according to the will, only now it is done on a table in the vestry instead of on the Communion table. Now that's a bit of curious history, is it not?" and we confessed that it was, and duly jotted it all down in our note-book just as told to us. When we had finished, our informant further added, "I have heard that an account of the dice-tossing was given in one of the London papers, only by some mistake it was said to have taken place at St. Ives in Cornwall, and some one from there wrote to the paper and said that there was not a word of truth in the story." So the conversation went on. The only other item of special interest that I can remember now, is that he remarked that perhaps we did not know the origin of the name of Huntingdon. We confessed our ignorance on the subject, and he forthwith kindly enlightened us, though I cannot, of course, in any way vouch for the authenticity of a statement made by an utter stranger in the street of a country town! Still, I give it for what it may be worth, and because the derivation seems not only plausible but probable. According to our unknown authority, then, in Saxon times the country around Huntingdon was one vast

forest given over to the chase, and the place was then called Hunting-ton — or Hunting-town, in modern English—and from this to Huntingdon is an easy transition.

Curiously enough, just after writing this record of a chance conversation, I came upon a paragraph in the *Standard* giving an account of the St. Ives dice-tossing, which runs as follows, and bears out the story as told to us:—"The ancient custom of raffling for Bibles in the parish church of St. Ives took place yesterday. The vicar directed the proceedings, and twelve children cast dice for the six Bibles awarded. The custom dates from 1675, and is in accordance with the will of Dr. Wilde, who left £50 to provide a fund for the purpose. It was expended on what is still called 'Bible Orchard,' with the rent of which the books are bought, and a small sum paid to the vicar for preaching a special sermon."

The bridge at St. Ives we found to be a most interesting and picturesque structure, having a tall building over the centre pier, and in addition a low and smaller building over another pier at the farther end, that looked as though it might have been originally a toll-house. Four out of the six arches of the bridge were pointed, and thereby suggested the ecclesiastical architect. The remaining two were rounded, doubtless reconstructed so at a later period. At the base of the house that stood in the middle of the bridge was a little balcony with iron railings round it, to which access was given by a door, so that the tenant of the house could sit outside and

have a quiet smoke whilst amusing himself watching the craft going up and down stream. The bridges at Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire and at Wakefield in Yorkshire have their old chapels, and one of the bridges at Monmouth has its ancient fortified gateway thereon ; but I do not know of any bridge in England besides that of St. Ives that has an inhabited house upon it.

Crossing the river on the quaint, old, and time-worn bridge (of which an engraving is given at the head of the first chapter), we soon found ourselves once again in the greenful country ; and walking over a meadow that seemed to us a good mile long, we reached the pleasant Ouse, shimmering like a broad band of silver in the soft sunshine, and gliding slowly and smoothly along its sinuous course between flower-decked fields and reed-grown banks, with over-arching trees ever and again that gave deliciously cool reflections in the stream below.

After the hoary bridge and ancient time-dimmed town, how fresh and bright looked the fair open country, so full of exuberant vitality! How gray and aged the dusky town appeared from our distant standpoint—the wear and tear of centuries was upon it ; by contrast how ever young and unchangeable the country seemed. The one so mutable, the other so immutable!

As we wandered on, we suddenly found ourselves in a most picturesque nook, where the river made a bend and a bay, and was overshadowed by trees—a peace-bestowing spot it was, and in the shallow edge of the stream, beneath the sheltering

trees, cattle were lazily resting and cooling themselves. Here too we discovered a rambling old mill, the subdued droning of whose great wheel mingled with the plashing of falling water and the murmuring sur—sur—suring of the wind-stirred foliage—sounds that were just enough to make us realise the stillness and tranquilness of the spot. One does not always comprehend the quietude of Nature; we travel too much in company to do this. But besides the old mill, that so pleased us that we forthwith made a sketch of it, there was close at hand an ancient lock, gray and green, and just sufficiently tumble-down to be perfectly picturesque. Look which way we would, we looked upon a picture. Perhaps the one that pleased us best was the view of the great gabled mill as seen from the top of the lock, with the big leafy trees outstretching behind it, and the weedy and worn towing-path winding in front.

As we stood by the lock sketching the old mill —called Knight's mill, we learnt from the lock-keeper—a barge came along drawn by a gray horse, for there is traffic on the Ouse, but only just enough to give it a little needful life and interest. As the barge proceeded on its journey, we observed that, at a point where the tow-path apparently ended, the horse went boldly down into the water and walked on in the river close by the bank where it was shallow; it struck us from this that it would hardly do to rely solely upon the tow-path for exploring purposes.

Not far from the mill and lock is Hemingford

Grey, a pretty village whose fine old church stands picturesquely by the side of the river. The church appeared formerly to have possessed a fine spire, but now only a stump of it remains, and each angle of this is adorned with a small stone ball that gives a curious look to the building. Just against the churchyard, that is merely divided from the river by a low wall, is a little landing-place for boats; so we imagined that some of the country folk are rowed or punted to church on Sundays—quite a romantic and an agreeable proceeding in the summer time.

Here we saw a man on the bank fishing with a bamboo rod, contentedly catching nothing—a lesson in patience and perseverance. The rod he declared to be an ideal one to angle with, being so light and strong; nevertheless, we observed that, in spite of this advantage, he had caught no fish. Perchance they were shy or "off their feed" that day; they always seem to be so, I know, when I go a-fishing. Then we asked him about the church spire—had it never been completed, or had it been struck by lightning, or had it been pulled down as unsafe?

"You've not guessed right," he replied; "it was blown down"! Now this struck us as extraordinary. Church spires do not generally get blown down, yet that very day we had come upon two, not very far apart, that had so suffered. Either this part of England must be very windy, or the spires must have been very badly built! It was a strange and puzzling fact.

Cowper stayed some time at Hemingford Grey,

and wrote a few of his poems there; and as it seems to me a most charming spot, I am perplexed to understand how he could write of the scenery around Huntingdon, of which it forms part, thus: —"My lot is cast in a country where we have neither woods nor commons, nor pleasant prospects —all flat and insipid; in the summer adorned with willows, and in the winter covered with a flood." Surely Cowper must have been in an extra melancholy mood at the time, else why does he condemn a country thus, that he praises for its beauties in verse? Are there two standards of beauty, one for poetry and one for prose?

So we rambled on by the cheerful riverside, over the greenest of meadows, past ancient villages and picturesque cottages, past water-mills, and with occasional peeps, by way of change, of busy windmills inland, past primitive locks and shallow fords, till we reached Godmanchester. Our verdict, given after our enjoyable tramp, is that the Ouse from St. Ives to Huntingdon is a most picturesque and paintable stream, simply abounding in picture-making material. Quite as good "stuff" (to use artists' slang) may be found on the Ouse as on the Thames, with the added charm of freshness, for the beauties of the Thames have been so painted and photographed, to say nothing of being engraved, that they are familiar to all, and over-familiarity is apt to beget indifference!

So we rambled leisurely along by the river side, over meadows spangled with daisies and buttercups, those lowly but bright and lovely flowers

of the sward, by ancient villages and unpretending cottage homes, that pleased because they were so unpretending, by droning water-mills and whirling windmills, by picturesquely neglected locks, by shallow fords, and by countless beauty-bits such as artists love, till we reached Godmanchester—a quiet little town, remarkable neither for beauty nor for ugliness, that stands just over the Ouse from Huntingdon. Here we crossed first some low-lying ground, and then the river by a raised causeway and a long stone bridge, darkly gray from age; on the wall in the centre of this bridge is a stone slab inscribed:—

Robertus Cooke
Ex Aquis emersus
Hoc viatoribus sacrum
D.D. 1637.

It appears that, in the year above stated, this Dr. Robert Cooke, whilst crossing the causeway, then in bad repair, was washed off his feet and nearly drowned, the river running strongly past in heavy flood at the time; and in gratitude for his narrow escape he left in his will a certain sum of money, the interest on which was to be expended in keeping the causeway and bridge in perfect repair for ever.

This reminds me of the historic fact that no less a personage than Oliver Cromwell, when a schoolboy, at this spot and under similar circumstances, also nearly lost his life, but was saved from drowning by the timely aid of a Huntingdon clergyman who was likewise crossing at the time. When, in after

years, Cromwell, no longer unknown to fame, chanced to be passing through the streets of Huntingdon at the head of his Ironsides, he happened to notice the very clergyman watching the procession, and, smiling, reminded him of the incident, asking him if he remembered it. "I do well," replied the clergyman, who bore no love towards the Puritans, "and I wish to God I had let you drown rather than have saved your life to use it to fight against your king." To which Cromwell sternly retorted, "It was God's will, you merely acted as His servant to perform His wishes. Be pleased, sir, to remember that."

CHAPTER VI

Cromwell's birthplace—Records of the past—Early photographs—A breezy day—Home-brewed ale—Americans on English scenery—Alconbury Hill—The plains of Cambridgeshire—The silence of Nature—Stilton—A decayed coaching town—A medieval hostelry—A big sign-board—Old-world traditions—Miles from anywhere.

RETURNING to our comfortable hostelry after our pleasant wanderings, we felt just sufficiently tired to enjoy the luxury of taking our ease therein, but "hungry as hunters" from our long tramp, therefore we rejoiced in the fact that the worthy landlady had not forgotten her guests, for we found quite a sumptuous repast awaiting us, worthy of the ancient traditions of the house, though we on our part, it must be confessed, were not equally worthy of the traditions of our ancestors in the wine side of the feast; indeed, our healthy out-of-door life gave us a positive distaste for wine of any kind. We always infinitely preferred a homely draught of good old English ale, than which, for thirsty mortals, a better drink has yet to be invented!

It may be remembered—though we only gleaned the fact whilst in Huntingdon—that Oliver Cromwell was born in that town, and was educated at the grammar school there. The house in which the

Protector "first saw the light of day" has, alas! been pulled down, but an ancient drawing thereof represents it as being a comfortable and substantial two-storied building, apparently of stone, having Tudor mullioned windows and three projecting dormers in the roof. At the commencement of the century the house was standing, and was shown as one of the sights of the place. If only photography had been invented earlier, what interesting and faithful records might have been preserved for us of such old historic places which are now no more! As it is, we have to be content with ancient drawings or prints of bygone England, and these not always skilfully done, nor probably always correct in detail. Furthermore, artists, then as now, perhaps more then than now, romanced a little at times, and therefore were not so faithful to facts as they might have been; as witness many of Turner's poems in paint, which, however beautiful as pictures, are by no means invariably true representations of the places and scenes they profess to portray. Indeed, there is a story told of Turner, who, when sketching from Nature upon one occasion, deliberately drew a distant town on the opposite side of the river to which it really stood, because, as he explained, "It came better so"!

An unknown and very kind friend some time ago most courteously sent me a number of prints from paper negatives taken in the early days of photography by the Fox-Talbot process, and amongst these chanced to be an excellent view of the ancient hostelry of the "George" at Norton St. Philips in Somerset (a wonderful old inn, by the way, which I

have already very fully described in a former work [1]). When I received the prints, I had only recently both carefully drawn and photographed the quaint old-time hostelry, and I found that, even in the comparatively short period that had elapsed since the Fox-Talbot negatives were made, certain marked changes had taken place in the building; so there can be no doubt as to the value and interest of such recording photographs, for the lens has no bias, but faithfully reproduces what is before it, neither adding to nor taking away therefrom for the sake of effect. Now that, fortunately, both the amateur and professional photographer are in evidence everywhere, future generations will happily possess true, if not always artistic, representations of places and historic spots as they really were at the time of being taken; and in the case of matters of antiquarian or archæological interest, we can well pardon the probable loss of picturesqueness for the sake of accuracy. Fancy, if we could only have to-day photographs preserved for us showing, for example, Fountains Abbey in the full glory of its Gothic prime, or of other notable buildings of the medieval age, how we should prize them! If we only had a few faithful photographs of Elizabethan England to compare with Victorian England, what a precious possession they would be! What would not one give for a "snap-shot" of the Invincible (?) Armada arrogantly sailing up the English Channel in stately procession, or of the innumerable pageants of bygone times with all their wealth of picturesque paraphernalia!

[1] *Through Ten English Counties.*

We were up early in the morning, and before breakfast had made a sketch of the quaint and ancient courtyard of the "George," an engraving of which is given in the last chapter. By a little after nine the dog-cart, packed for travelling, was at the side door of our inn, and bidding good-bye to the landlady—who in the good old-fashioned manner had come to see us off and wish us a pleasant journey—we took our departure, and were soon once more in the open country. Overnight we had, as our wont, consulted our map as to our next day's stage, and determined that we would drive to Stamford, just twenty-five and three-quarter miles from Huntingdon, according to our faithful *Paterson*.

Again we had delightful weather: a fresh, invigorating breeze was blowing from the west; overhead was a deep blue sky, from which the sun shone warmly, but not too warmly, down. The air was clear and sweet, and the country all around full of brightness, colour, and movement, for the wind swayed the trees in its path, and made golden waves as it swept over the unreaped corn-fields, and green ones as it passed over the long grasses in the meadows; it rippled the waters on ponds and rivers, and whirled the sails of the windmills round at a merry pace; the brisk breeze gave animation to the landscape, and seemed to imbue it with actual life. Huntingdonshire, fortunately for the traveller therein, possesses no large manufacturing towns, Huntingdon, St. Neots, and St. Ives being of the compact, clean, homely order—more agricultural centres than commercial ones. Therefore the atmosphere of the county is

not smoke-laden or oppressed with grayness, but pure, bright, and buoyant, with the scent of the real country about it—an atmosphere that makes one suddenly realise that there is a pleasure in merely breathing!

About two miles out we came to a little roadside inn having the sign of the "Three Horse-shoes" displayed in front. Why three horse-shoes? Four, one would imagine, would be the proper number. Here we observed a notice that the thirsty wayfarer could indulge in "Home-brewed Ale," rather a rare article in these days of tied houses, when large brewing firms buy up all the "publics" they can, so as to ensure the sale of their beer thereto, and no other. Now, it may be pure fancy on my part, for fancy counts for much, but in my opinion there is a special flavour and pleasing character about *good* home-brewed ale never to be found in that coming from the big commercial breweries.

A little farther on our road brought us to Little Stukeley, a rather picturesque village. Here, to the left of the way, stood a primitive old inn, with its sign let into the top of a projecting chimney-stack, an uncommon and curious place for a sign. In fact there were two signs, one above the other; the top one was of square stone carved in low relief to represent a swan with a chain round its body. The carving was all painted white (except the chain, which was black), and bore the initials in one corner of C. D. E., with the date 1676. Just below this, on a separate and oblong tablet, painted a leaden colour, was the carved representation of a fish—

intended, we learnt, for a salmon, as the inn was called the "Swan and Salmon." We felt duly grateful for the lettered information, otherwise we might in our ignorance have imagined the sign to be the "Swan and Big Pike"!

Now we passed through a pretty but apparently sparsely-populated country; indeed, it is strange how little the presence of man is revealed in some portions of rural England, though the signs of his labour are everywhere in evidence. Upon one occasion, when driving a prominent American citizen, a guest of mine, across country (in order that he might behold it from another point of view than that afforded by a railway carriage, the general mode of seeing strange countries nowadays), I took the opportunity of asking him what he was most struck with in the English landscape. "Its uninhabited look," was the prompt reply; "and that is the very last thing I expected. I see great parks here and there, and now and then I get a peep of a lordly palace standing in stately solitude therein, as though it needs must keep as far removed from the plebeian outer world as possible; but the homes of the people (I mean those who are neither very rich nor very poor), where do they hide themselves? From all I have seen to-day, had I not known the facts, I should have imagined it was Old England that was the new and thinly-populated land, and not my American State. With you, I guess, it is a civilised feudalism that still prevails: the palace surrounded by its park takes the place of the ancient castle surrounded by its moat—the outer forms

have changed, the spirit still remains. The English country strikes me as a land of magnificent mansions and humble cottages."

I was so struck by this statement of views, that on my return home I looked up the works of some American authors who have written about England, to gather what they might say on the subject, and I found that John Burroughs, in an appreciative essay on English scenery in his *Winter Sunshine*, writes his impressions of it thus:—"To American eyes the country seems quite uninhabited, there are so few dwellings and so few people. Such a landscape at home would be dotted all over with thrifty farmhouses, each with its group of painted outbuildings, and along every road and highway would be seen the well-to-do turnouts of the independent freeholders. But in England the dwellings of the poor people, the farmers, are so humble and inconspicuous, and are really so far apart, and the halls and the country-seats of the aristocracy are so hidden in the midst of vast estates, that the landscape seems almost deserted, and it is not till you see the towns and great cities that you can understand where so vast a population keeps itself." It is interesting sometimes "to see ourselves as others see us," and never was I more entertained than by hearing the outspoken opinions upon England and the English of a notable Japanese official whom I met in California, and who confided to me his ideas and views of things British, imagining I was an American citizen all the time, and I did not undeceive him.

On our map we saw Alconbury Hill marked

right on our road of to-day, also we found it noted in our *Paterson*, therefore we expected to have some stiff collar-work, for we reasoned to ourselves, when an Ordnance map makes prominent mention of a hill it means climbing for us; so we were surprised to find the hill only a gentle, though rather long, rise, with a descent on the other side to correspond —trotting-ground every inch of the way. From the top of the modest elevation, however, we had an extensive prospect opening out before us over the flat, far-reaching plains of Cambridgeshire—a little world of green meadows and tilled fields, varied by many-tinted woods, enlivened by the gleam of still water and the silvery thread of winding stream—a vast panorama stretching away farther than our eyes could reach, for the far-off horizon was lost in a faint blue haze that seemed to wed the sky to the land. There is a certain fascination in looking over such a breadth of earth and sky to be felt rather than described; it affords one an idea of the majesty of space!

The country, as we drove on, became very lovely but very lonely; we had the road all to ourselves for miles, not even the ubiquitous cyclist did we see, and the fields on either hand appeared strangely deserted; a profound peace brooded over all, so that even the tramping of our horses' feet and the crunching of our wheels on the hard road seemed preternaturally loud—and we realised what a noise-producing creature man is! I knew a Londoner, who lived within sound of the perpetual roar of street traffic, after spending a night in a remote

country house, actually complain of the painful stillness there, averring that he could not sleep for it! So silent is Nature when at rest, and so unaccustomed is the average town-dweller to its quietude. To Charles Lamb the tranquillity of the country was "intolerable dulness"; to others it is infinite rest. Lamb wrote: "Let not the lying poets be believed, who entice men from the cheerful streets. . . . Let no native Londoner imagine that health and rest, innocent occupation, interchange of converse sweet, and recreative study, can make the country anything better than altogether odious and detestable. A garden was the primitive prison, till man, with Promethean felicity and boldness, luckily sinned himself out of it"!

Driving on, we observed a large old house to our right close to the roadway; this we imagined from appearances had formerly been a fine old coaching hostelry, but now it is divided down the centre, one half doing duty as a farmstead, the other half still being a house of entertainment, that proclaims itself with the sign of the "Crown and Woolpack." I find that an inn so named is marked at this very spot on a last-century travelling map I possess, so that it was presumably then of some importance. To-day it struck us that the farmhouse looked more prosperous than the inn.

As we proceeded, the country all around had a mellow, home-like look, smiling and humanised with long abiding and the tireless toil of generations of hardy workers: it was a delightful compound of green fields, leafy trees, tangled hedgerows,

murmuring streams, with winding roads and inviting footpaths leading everywhere. Here and there, too, we caught pleasant peeps of the gray gable-ends of ancient homes amidst the woods, the rest being drowned in foliage. The scenery was thoroughly, intensely English. Had you by some magic been suddenly transplanted there from some distant region of the world, you would have had no hesitation in saying that you were in England, for no other scenery in the world is quite the same as what we looked upon. Here again let an American give his opinion. I find Mark Twain, in his *More Tramps Abroad*, thus writes: "After all, in the matter of certain physical patent rights, there is only one England. Now that I have sampled the globe, I am not in doubt. There is the beauty of Switzerland, and it is repeated in the glaciers and snowy ranges of many parts of the earth; there is the beauty of the fiord, and it is repeated in New Zealand and Alaska; there is the beauty of Hawaii, and it is repeated in ten thousand islands of the Southern Seas; there is the beauty of the prairie and the plain, and it is repeated here and there in the earth. Each of these is worshipful, each is perfect in its way, yet holds no monopoly of its beauty; but that beauty which is England is alone—it has no duplicate. It is made up of very simple details—just grass, and trees, and shrubs, and roads, and hedges, and gardens, and houses, and churches, and castles, and here and there a ruin, and over it all a mellow dreamland of history. But its beauty is incomparable, and all its own."

It is not always the grandest scenery that affords

the most lasting pleasure, rather is it the quiet beauty that lies in our rural everyday landscape that holds the sweetest remembrance. Grandeur may excite our admiration, call forth our most expressive adjectives, but it is the lovable that dwells nearest the heart, whose memory is the closest treasured in after years; and it is this very quality of lovableness that the English scenery flows over with that so charms and binds one's affections. English scenery does not challenge attention by any *tour de force;* it simply allures you by its sweet smile and home-like look. As Thackeray says, "The charming, friendly English landscape! Is there any in the world like it? . . . It looks so kind, it seems to shake hands with you as you pass through it."

About twelve miles from Huntingdon stands the little decayed town of Stilton—a famous place in the old coaching days, when the traffic here on the Great North Road is said never to have ceased for five minutes, day or night, the whole year round. But now Stilton has shrunk to little more than a large village. Thanks to the railway, its prosperity is a thing of the past, depending as it did almost wholly upon its inns, which in turn depended upon the road traffic. As we drove into the drowsy old town (I use the term in courtesy), that seems to have gone to sleep never to waken more, our eyes were delighted by the vision of a genuine, little-altered, medieval hostelry—of which very few remain in the land. It was a picture rather than a place—a dream of old-world architecture; and this is what we saw before us: a long, low, gabled building, with

bent, uneven roof and shapely stacks of chimneys, with the usual low archway in, or about, the centre, giving access to the stable-yard, and a grand old sign-board, supported by great brackets of scrolled iron-work, and further upheld by a post in the roadway (there is a curious old inn, the "Chequers," at Tunbridge, with its sign supported in a similar manner). The fine sign-board of the inn at Stilton bears the representation of a huge bell, and forms quite a feature in the building; the front of the latter has a delightful mellow, gray tone—a sort of bloom that only age can give, the priceless dower of centuries.

So charmed were we with this quaint and picturesque specimen of a past-time hostelry of the pre-coaching era, that we involuntarily pulled up to gaze upon it at our leisure, half afraid lest it should prove an illusion, and like a dream vanish into nothingness; but no, it was a happy reality, and not the delusion of a moment—it was "a something more than fiction." Not often in these prosaic days does the driving tourist come upon a romance in stone like this, for romance was written large over all its time-toned walls—walls that since the hostelry was first raised, over three storied centuries ago, must have looked upon many strange sights and eventful doings. Then the highway to the North was in parts but little better than a track. The "gentlemen of the road" made travelling a doubtful delight, full of excitement, and more dangerous than tiger-hunting now is. Little wonder, therefore, that our medieval ancestors commended their souls to

God before starting out on a journey; even the early coaching bills took the precaution of stating that "the journey would be performed, God permitting." The modern railway time-table compilers are not so particular!

Driving under the ancient archway, we entered the stable-yard of the "Bell," and found that, in spite of the changed times and forsaken look of the place, we could put our horses up there, as well as obtain a meal for ourselves. Whereupon we ordered the best that the house could provide "for man and beast." Having settled this necessary detail, we at once went outside and began work on a sketch of the ancient hostelry (an engraving which will be found with this chapter). So engrossed did we become with our pleasant task, that we forgot all about our meal, so the landlord had to come out to remind us about it. We excused ourselves by remarking that we could eat and drink any day, but not always had we the opportunity of sketching such a picturesque bit of building. The landlord simply smiled, and gazed at us inquiringly. What was passing in his mind I cannot say, but he remarked that our chops were getting cold. Possibly he wondered at any one preferring to stand outside in the roadway drawing an old inn, instead of sitting within it feasting. Moreover, he reminded us that he had some excellent ale. This was a sudden descent from the poetic to the practical, but the practical prevailed, for we had to confess to ourselves that we were hungry, and thirsty too; and as my wife pertinently remarked, "The chops won't

wait, and the inn will; it has waited several hundreds of years where it is, and you can finish your sketch after lunch." The argument was unanswerable, so we stepped within, and did ample justice to the repast that mine host had provided. I am inclined to think that the sketch did not suffer for the interruption, for a hungry man is apt to draw hastily, be he ever so enthusiastic about his work. Our repast finished and our drawing done, we sought out the landlord—a stout, jovial-looking personage; may his shadow never grow less!—for a chat, in the hope of gleaning thereby some information or traditions about the old place, and were not wholly disappointed.

It appeared that mine host had been there thirty-two years, and even in his recollection much of the stabling and a portion of the building in the rear also had gone to decay, and consequently was pulled down. He seemed proud of his ancient inn, but especially proud of the original sign-board, which, being of copper, for lightness, had not decayed, neither had it warped. "Now, I'll wager you cannot guess the height of it within a foot," he exclaimed, looking up at the swinging board. We thought we could, it seemed an easy matter; so we guessed and failed! We conjectured five feet. "Ah!" exclaimed the landlord, "I knew you would guess wrong—everybody does. Why, it's six feet and two and three-quarter inches high! I've been up on a ladder and measured it myself. It does look big when you're up close to it. There used to be lots of bets about it, I've heard, in the old coaching days, much to the profit of the drivers; for you see they knew the height and

A MEDIEVAL HOSTELRY: THE BELL INN, STILTON.

their passengers didn't. It was said to be the finest sign on the road. More than once, to settle a wager, the coach waited whilst the board was measured. It's a sad pity, but the scrolled iron-work is corroding away, besides getting bent out of place here and there from the heat of the sun, but I expect it will last my time for all that. The owner would like to restore the old inn, only there is so little road custom now, it would not pay to do so." "But how about the cyclists," we queried; "do you not obtain a good deal of custom from them?" "Well, not very much, sir. Somehow, they seem mostly to pass along without stopping. Now and then one or two may stop just for a glass of ale, but the majority of them simply slow down a bit as they pass by, and exclaim, 'What a funny old place!' or a similar remark; but a few odd glasses of ale and a lot of remarks don't go far towards paying rent. You see, there's nothing to come here for, this isn't a tourist country. Now, were we only near to a watering-place, we should get a lot of folks a-driving over to see the old house, refreshing themselves, and baiting their horses. Then there would be money in it." For myself, I am selfishly glad that the "Bell" at Stilton is not near any fashionable resort, otherwise there would be a great chance of its picturesqeness being improved away. As it is, it may still, with a little repairing now and then, last for centuries, to delight the eye of antiquaries and artists yet unborn —a bit of history in stone of the never-returning past.

Then the landlord asked us to go into his garden

at the back, and there presented us with one of his roses. "It's a rare kind," he said; "they call it a new rose. A gentleman living near here gave a big price for a stock one like it; but when he showed me his purchase I told him that I had just the same kind in my garden, and it had been there for seven years; and he would not believe me till he came and saw for himself. There's what you call a spa spring in the garden. In olden times it used to be considered a cure for some complaints, but it seems forgotten now. It is the only spring in the place; all the other water has to be got from wells."

The name of Stilton is, of course, a familiar household word, as the little town gave its name to the now famous cheese. I find my copy of *Paterson* has the following note about the place:—"Stilton has long been celebrated for the excellence of its cheese, which not unfrequently has been called the English Parmesan. It is asserted that this article was first made by a Mrs. Paulet of Wymondham, near Melton Mowbray, in Leicestershire, who supplied the celebrated Cooper Thornhill, who kept the Bell Inn in this village, with this new manufacture, which he often sold for 2s. 6d. per lb., and hence it is said to have received its name from the place of sale. This Thornhill was a famous rider, and is recorded to have won the cup at Kimbolton with a mare that he accidentally took on the course after a journey of twelve miles." Another performance of this sporting worthy was to ride to London and back for a wager within twelve hours. I find by my road-book the distance for the double journey to be 150 miles,

so that he must have ridden over twelve miles an hour; and a good day's work in truth!

Most of the landlords of the old coaching hostelries were sporting men, and wonderful stories are told of their doings, stories that probably, like most wines, have improved with age. Indeed, a vast amount of inn-lore (we have folk-lore, why not inn-lore?) may be picked up by the road traveller of to-day, from talkative landlords and communicative ostlers, if he be a good listener. I should think that I have gathered this journey sufficient anecdotes of the road, good, bad, and indifferent, to fill two chapters at least. But the stories lose much when retold in prosaic print; it is the persons who tell them, and the manner of telling, together with suitable surroundings, that give them a special charm. To do them justice you must hear them in a remote country hostelry from the lips of some jovial old host —for a few such may still be found on the way— whose interest lies in that direction; and if told in his low-ceilinged parlour, hung round with prints of coaching and sporting subjects, produced in the pre-chromo-lithographic age, so much the better; if over a pipe, better still. Then perchance mine host may settle down and warm up to his subject, when one story will inevitably suggest another, and that still another, and so on apparently *ad infinitum*, till your note-book is filled with all sorts of curious histories. Or failing the landlord, the "wrinkled ostler, grim and thin," may well supply his place; and the rambling old inn-yard where some of the wonderful feats related took place, or are presumed to have

taken place, forms a very appropriate and telling background to the tale. We have had the *Tales of my Landlord.* Who will give us the *Tales of an Ostler?* These, judging from my own selection, might, with a little necessary weeding, prove interesting and, in certain cases, even sensational reading.

I well remember, some few years back, when touring in Yorkshire, the aged ostler of a solitary inn on the moors, where we were weather-bound for a time, related to me, by way of pleasantly passing the time, a blood-curdling story about the house in the "good old times." I must say that the story suited well the building, for it was a bleak, inhospitable-looking house, with long untenanted, unfurnished chambers, its stables going to decay, and mostly given over to cobwebs and half-starved mice—the whole place looking doubly dreary in the dripping rain: a gray drooping sky and a soughing wind serving only too successfully to accentuate its dismalness. "Ah," exclaimed the ostler as we stood together sheltering from the steady downpour in a corner of the stables, "there were queer doings in the old place. I've heard tell, in past times, many a belated traveller who put up here for the night never got no further if he were supposed to have much money upon him; that is, for the landlord then, they do say, combined inn-keeping with robbery. There were one bedroom in the house where they used to put likely travellers to sleep, and this had a secret door to it. It's yon room with the low window overlooking the yard, and, well, next morning the traveller had disappeared no one knew

where; but a lot of skeletons have been found when digging in the moor round about. However, one night the landlord caught a Tartar. There was a scuffle in the room, and some pistol shots were heard, and the landlord was found dead on the floor: the traveller turned out to be a famous highwayman, who so cowed the rest of the house that he rode off in the morning with a good share of the landlord's plunder to which he quietly helped himself." But then the story may not be true, or only true in part, for tradition is a sad scandal-monger; and tradition, unlike a rolling stone, gathers substance as it goes on. I should perhaps state, in fairness to the worthy ostler's tale-telling talent, that I have only given his grim story in brief, and have purposely omitted some very gruesome and thrilling details that he positively gloated over. These my readers can supply for themselves if they be so minded, providing a trap-door in the floor of the chamber, with a deep well immediately below, and flavouring to taste.

But to return to the "Bell" at Stilton, from which I have wandered far afield. This gray and ancient hostelry, with its weather-tinted walls, produced an impression upon us difficult to analyse; it verily seemed as though there must be some old legend or mystery connected with the building and only waiting to be discovered. The glamour of romance seemed to brood over it; a romance in which the "knights of the road" figured prominently, and we began to weave a little story "all our own," after the most approved manner of Harrison

Ainsworth. Dick Turpin must have known this hostelry very well, it being on his favourite and most paying line of road; and the chances are that he stopped at it more than once, for it was in a remote position and a convenient halting-place for his calling. Outwardly the old inn may be a trifle more time-toned and not so trim or well kept as then, but otherwise I do not imagine that either it or the town has altered much since his day. On the whole it doubtless looks much the same to us now as it did to him. Stilton is a place that in an age of change has remained unchanged; since the last coach departed thence it appears to have fallen into a deep sleep with small prospect of ever awakening again. The railway has left it quite out in the cold. Of Stilton it may truly be written, "It was!"

Dick Turpin must have passed by the "Bell" on his famous ride to York—if ever that ride took place, for sundry hard-headed and hard-hearted antiquaries, who ought to know better, declare the episode to be as apocryphal as the "Battle of Dorking." Legends should not be judged by the same standard as matter-of-fact history! I wish learned authorities would devote their time to some more profitable task than that of upsetting innocent and perfectly harmless romances: already they have demolished nearly all the fabled stories of my childhood, besides a host of my favourite traditions which I liked to feel might be true, such as the picturesque elopement of Dorothy Vernon. "In reality nine out of every ten traditions are deliberate inventions." Possibly; nevertheless I find no special

pleasure in being assured that "Cæsar never cried that cry to Brutus; Cromwell never said 'Take away that bauble'; Wellington denied that he uttered, 'Up, Guards, and at them!' and the story of Cambronne declaring that 'The Old Guard dies, but never surrenders,' is now known to have been invented by Rougemont two days after the battle. . . . As for the Abbé Edgeworth's farewell to Louis XVI. on the guillotine, the cry of the crew of the sinking *Vengeur*, and the pretty story of young Barra in the war of La Vendée—these are all myths"—and more's the pity!

It was with great reluctance that we bade good-bye to the quaint and ancient "Bell" at Stilton, and in spite of the unreliability of traditions generally, we could not help wondering whether there were any truth in the oft-repeated story that Dick Turpin had half the landlords between London and York "under articles" to him, and if the then landlord of this special inn were one of them.

On the front of a lonely little hostel at Upware, in the wide Fenland of Cambridgeshire, is inscribed "Five Miles from Anywhere. No Hurry," and it struck us that these words might equally well be painted on the front, or beneath the sign, of the "Bell" at Stilton. There is a sense of remoteness about the decayed, medieval hostelry that suits well the legend: for Stilton is miles from anywhere, and it seems generations removed from the present prosaic age of progress, rush, and bustle. It is a spot in which the past appears the reality, and the present a dream!

CHAPTER VII

Norman Cross—A Norman-French inscription—A re-headed statue —The friendliness of the road—The art of being delightful—The turnpike roads in their glory—Bits for the curious—A story of the stocks — "Wansford in England" — Romance and reality—The glamour of art—"The finest street between London and Edinburgh"—Ancient "Callises"—A historic inn —Windows that have tales to tell.

Leaving Stilton we had a pleasant stretch of rural country of the restful, home-like, friendly order, but none the less beautiful because of an unambitious type. It was a constant delight to us to search for, and to discover what was most beautiful in the every-day English country we passed through; the charm of such quiet scenery is that it never palls nor becomes wearisome with familiarity, as more pretentious landscapes often do. Far fresher and more enjoyable was it, to us, to wander leisurely about rural England out of the well-beaten tourist track than to traverse a district famous for its scenery, belauded by guide-books, and crowded by excursionists, where beforehand you know almost exactly what to expect and where therefore pleasant surprises, or discoveries, are rare; but, on the other hand, by anticipating too much, disappointment often awaits one.

At Norman Cross, a tiny hamlet with a suggestive name, situated about a mile on our way out of Stilton, there are the slight remains of the colony of barracks that were erected in the last century, wherein some thousands of French prisoners were confined during the Napoleonic wars. From Norman Cross we drove merrily along until we came to the pretty village of Water Newton, pleasantly situated by the side of the river Nen, or Nene,—for I find it spelt both ways on my map. Here the time-mellowed church, placed rather in a hollow a meadow's length away from the road, attracted our attention, though why it especially did so I hardly know, for there was apparently nothing particularly noteworthy about it, at least not more so than any one of the other country fanes we had passed unregarded by that day. Moreover, our tastes for the moment did not incline to things ecclesiastical. But it is a fact, that now and then, without any definable cause, a certain spot, or place, will excite one's interest and arouse within one a strong desire to stop and explore it: such sentimental, but very real, feelings defy all reasoning; they exist but cannot be explained or reduced to an argument.

So half-involuntarily we pulled up here. "We must see that old church," we exclaimed, though wherefore the compulsion we did not inquire of ourselves; but we went, in spite of the fact that it was getting late and that we had some miles more to accomplish before we reached Stamford, our night's destination. In the churchyard we noticed

an ancient stone coffin and lid, but we had seen many such stone coffins and lids before, so that these did not specially appeal to us. Then walking round the building, in search of any object of interest, we happened to glance at the tower, and on its west side we espied, about a third of the way up, a recess with a carved stone figure of a man standing therein, the hands of which were clasped as though in prayer. This at once excited our curiosity. On looking further we observed an inscription below the figure apparently in Norman-French, but the lettering was so much defaced that it was difficult to decipher, a difficulty increased by the distance we were away from it; nevertheless, nothing daunted, we boldly made the attempt, and whilst puzzling over the spelling without, be it confessed, making much progress, the rector fortunately discovered us and kindly came to our aid. Existence is doubtless somewhat uneventful in this quiet spot, and possibly he was not averse to the scarce luxury of a chat with a stranger. I must say it seems to me that the life many of our refined and educated clergy lead in remote, out-of-the-way rural districts, is not altogether an enviable one, for, as a rule, the society of such is sadly restricted, and the conversational powers of the farmers and agricultural labourers are apt to be somewhat limited, not to say monotonous. Arcadia has its delights, but they are not academical. The chief charms of ruralism to some people are to be found second-hand in "open-air" books! Therein lies the difference between the genuine and the pseudo Nature lover.

The church had been restored recently, so the rector informed us, and by aid of a ladder the inscription had been deciphered as follows :—

VOVS : KE : PAR
ISSI : PASSEZ
PVR : LE : ALME
TOMAS : PVR
DEN : PRIEZ

which I afterwards put into English thus, though I do not profess to be a Norman-French scholar, but in this case the translation seems manifest :—You that pass by here pray for the soul of Thomas Purden. This truly sounds rather like a command than begging a favour of a stranger, still I trust that this Thomas Purden had his demands amply gratified, and I further trust that his soul has benefited thereby—but what of the countless number of souls of other poor folk, equally dear to them, who had neither money nor influence to cause such an entreaty to be made public thus for their benefit? It was a hard faith that seemed to make it thus easier "for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" than for a poor man, and calls to mind the Puritans' dictum that Purgatory was invented to enrich the priest!

Who this Thomas Purden was the rector could not say, possibly now no one can : he may have been the founder of the church, though in that case one would have expected to find this memorial of him in the chancel, according to the prevailing custom ; it appears to me more probable, therefore, that he was the builder of the tower, or possibly a

benefactor of the church; but this is pure conjecture on my part, and conjectures must be taken for what they are worth.

The head of the statue, we were informed, was not the original one, which had decayed away or had been broken off, so that at the time of the restoration of the church the figure was headless: "However," we were informed, "the builder, curiously enough, had some old carved stone heads knocking about his yard, and he fitted on one of these in place of the missing one"! Thus is the lot of the future antiquary made hard: but this is not so blameworthy as an instance that came under my notice on a previous tour, when I discovered that a mason had inserted an ancient dated stone over the porch of an old house he had been called in to repair, solely because he had it on hand and thought it looked ornamental there! This was enough to deceive the very archæological elect! I have to confess that the new head supplied to Master Thomas Purden appeared to be, from our point of view below, a good "ready-made" fit; but therein lies the greater pitfall for the future antiquary aforementioned.

"Now," exclaimed the rector, "you will doubtless wonder why the figure with such an appeal to the public was placed on the side of the tower facing the meadows, and not on the side facing the road." As a matter of fact this detail had not occurred to us; one cannot think of everything—though we tried to look surprised at the fact—then the rector continued, apparently pleased by

our perspicacity: "Well, formerly the road went past the west front of the tower, close under it indeed, and crossed the river by a ford; if you look along the fields you can see traces of it even now." So we looked and imagined we could see the traces in question, but our eyes, naturally, were not so accustomed to make them out as those of our informant. Then the rector, seeing the manifest interest we took in his church, most courteously devoted himself to us, and good-naturedly acted the part of guide, for which attentive civility we felt duly grateful. But that was not all, for after we had finished our inspection of the building, he, with thoughtful kindness, invited us into his snug rectory, hospitably intent on making us partake of afternoon tea; and this was by no means a solitary occasion of such a kindness shown to us—pressed upon us would be the more exact expression; utter strangers travelling by road!

Indeed, during our tour, the difficulty that frequently presented itself to us when we did not wish to dally on the way was how we could gracefully decline the many proffered invitations of a similar nature without appearing to be rude. At one time we thought that probably the sight of the dog-cart, as showing that we were presumably respectable wayfarers, might have had something to do with the continued courtesies we received, for in almost every stranger we met we seemed to find a friend; but when touring alone on a walking tour, with only a knapsack strapped on my back, I have experienced the same kindly treatment, often too when in a dust-

stained condition. On one well-remembered occasion during the shooting season, when trespassing afoot across some moors in search of a short cut, I came suddenly upon the owner of the land with his party lunching; the owner was inclined to be indignant with me at first, but an apology for my inexcusable trespass quietly expressed was followed by a few minutes' conversation, which ended in my being invited to join the lunching party, no refusal being permitted. "We insist upon your joining us as a penalty for your trespassing," was the jovial manner in which the invitation was enforced, and I accepted the inevitable without further demur!

After all the world is much as we make it; smile on it and it returns your smiles, frown and it frowns back again, greet it good-naturedly and it will return your greeting in kind. As Seneca says, "He that would make his travels delightful must first make himself delightful." And to do this he should cultivate a pleasant manner; it costs so little and returns so much, obtaining favours for which money would not avail, and generally smoothing wonderfully the way of the wanderer. Thus Emerson sings—

> What boots it thy virtue?
> What profit thy parts?
> The one thing thou lackest,
> The art of all arts.
>
> The only credential,
> Passport to success,
> Opens castles and parlours,—
> Address, man, address.

And Emerson knew!

During our past wanderings on wheels we have made numerous friends, and have received many kind invitations to spend a time at their homes, and in the course of this journey we received three such invitations, all from perfect strangers; only one of which we were enabled to accept, and in that case a most hearty welcome was extended to us. Such generous hospitality shown, which included stabling our horses, such a manifest anxiety evinced to make our short stay as enjoyable as possible, that mere thanks seemed a wholly insufficient return.

But to return to Water Newton church, after this digression and short sermon on civility which my readers are fully licensed to skip, the rector called our attention to the painstaking manner in which the tower was constructed: "All of ashlar work and scarcely any mortar, or cement, being used. The top of the tower has one feature about it that tells its own story; as you will see, a quantity of old Norman tooth-moulding has been employed in the window arches, manifestly preserved from an earlier building, for the joints of the ornamentations do not come evenly together; thus plainly proving resetting. On the farther and fourth side of the tower that is less seen the windows have none of this moulding, but are simply finished off in unadorned stone-work, the builders having presumably used up all the old carving in the more prominent positions."

Then entering the church the rector pointed out to us the name of "Original Jackson" cut in a flat

tombstone on the floor. The Christian name of "Original" being curious and, as far as I know, unique. At one time we learnt that there had been a dove-cote in the tower, or rather a portion of it formed a dove-cote of considerable size, and was doubtless a source of profit to the pre-Reformation clergy. At the foot of the tower is the old vestry door, and a very narrow one it is, so narrow indeed that, the story goes, a former priest of goodly proportions was unable to pass through it; therefore, as the door could not be conveniently altered, a new vestry with an ampler means of approach had to be devised. In a window recess in the south aisle is a recumbent stone effigy, much mutilated and cracked; the feet of this rest upon a lion, apparently showing the figure, which is under life-size, to be intended to represent a man, yet the features of the head with its long hair suggest a woman. We understood that this effigy was the cause of considerable dispute amongst antiquaries as to whether it were representative of a knight or a dame. We decided in favour of the lady. The church, we were informed, "is dedicated to St. Remigius, an almost unique dedication in England."

Then adjourning to the rectory we were shown there some very interesting specimens of Roman pottery and other ancient relics that the rector himself had found in a gravel-pit near by, at a spot where an old Roman encampment once had been. To show how times have changed we were told that two old houses between the rectory and

the road were formerly small but flourishing inns; and that an old farmer, aged eighty-three, who lived in an ivy-clad farmhouse a little farther on our way, well remembers sixteen mail-coaches passing Water Newton in the day: this was besides the ordinary non-mail-coaches, of which there were a number. Another reminder of other days and other ways, in the shape of a bygone custom quite novel to us, we gleaned from an old gaffer we met on the way. From him we learnt that in the pre-railway days, when the cattle were driven along the Great North Road from Scotland to the London markets, the animals were actually shod like horses so that their hoofs might stand the long journey on the hard highway. Several blacksmiths on the road moreover, we were given to understand, made a special business of shoeing such cattle apart from shoeing horses. So one travels and picks up curious bits of information. One man we saw gathering nettles assured us that, boiled, they made a delicious green vegetable, besides purifying the blood and being a cure for boils and the rheumatics. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "I should not wonder some day, when their virtues are discovered, to find rich people growing them in their gardens instead of spinach and the like. Nettles be a luxury. Now, if ever you suffers from the rheumatics mind you tries nettles, they beat all the doctor's medicine; they just do." And we promised to think the matter over. The idea of any one ever growing crops of nettles in their kitchen-gardens amused us. Still the weed, vegetable I mean, may have hidden virtues

I wot not of; and possibly it is not altogether wise to dismiss as absolute nonsense every item of country folk-lore one comes upon. I always jot such sayings down in my note-book, and shall soon have quite a collection of them. I remember one simple remedy that a farmer's wife told me of when a youngster, which, boy-like, I at once tried—and actually found it effectual! Some of the country-folk's cures, however, may be considered worse than the disease. Here, for instance, is one for baldness that I have not tested: "Rub well the bald parts with a fresh onion just cut, twice a day, for ten minutes at a time at least; and you must never miss a rubbing till the hair begins to grow again"!

Leaving Water Newton we drove on through a level country, passing in about a mile or so some ancient stocks and a whipping-post on a grassy corner by the roadside; these had been painted manifestly to preserve them as a curiosity. Some day, like ducking-stools and scolds' gags, they will possibly only be found in a museum. According to a paragraph in a local paper that I extracted the gist of on the journey, the last time that a man was condemned to the stocks in England was at the village of Newbold-on-Avon in Warwickshire late in this century. The man in question was a confirmed drunkard, and the magistrates fined him 7s. 6d. with the option of being placed in the stocks: the drunkard chose the stocks which he well knew were decayed and unfit for use; so they were forthwith repaired at some expense, which being done the man suddenly found the money for the fine and so

escaped the indignity of the stocks, and the doubtful honour of being the last person to be legally confined therein. When all else fails in the evenings at country inns, the local papers often afford much entertainment combined with information. The local antiquaries occasionally write to them upon matters of interest in the neighbourhood; and such communications are frequently well worth reading, for by perusing them the traveller out of the beaten track may obtain intelligence of old-time relics and quaint rural customs that he would otherwise probably never hear of, and such things are well worth knowing and preserving.

Wansford, the next village we came to, pleased us by its picturesqueness and its pleasant situation on the banks of the Nene, a wide and fishful-looking stream whose name we did not even know before we undertook this tour; so that driving across country teaches one a good deal about the geography of one's own land, besides affording the road wanderer an intimate knowledge of it, never obtainable from the railway.

Wansford is built of stone and is a charming specimen of an old English village; its houses and cottages strike the eye as being substantial, comfortable, and enduring; for you cannot well build meanly with stone. One large house in the village street, large enough to deserve the often-misappropriated term of mansion, with its stone-slab, overhanging roof, and strong stacks of chimneys, especially pleased us; neither roof, wall, nor window seemed as though any one of them would need repairs for long years:

possibly this building was originally a fine old coaching inn, for it stood close upon the roadway. Oh! the comfort of a well-built home like this, with a roof fit to weather the storms of centuries, and thick walls, so charmingly warm in winter and so delightfully cool in summer, wherein you may dwell in peace, and bills for repairs are almost an unknown thing.

The church here is a box-like structure, small, primitive, and ugly, and we merely went to view it because the rector at Water Newton had told us that the ancient font thereof was curious; it being carved round with men fighting—scarcely an appropriate ornamentation for a font in a Christian church though, one would imagine! Quite in keeping with the rude interior of this tiny fane is the wooden gallery at one end, with the most suitable inscription :—

This Loft Erected
January 1st, 1804.

I have only to add that it is an excellent example of the Churchwarden era of architecture, and you seldom find a structure of the period more ugly.

At Wansford we crossed the river Nene on a fine old stone bridge of thirteen arches, if we counted them aright: a solid bit of building pleasing to look upon and making a pretty picture from the meadows below with the clustering, uneven roofs of the village for a background. Over the centre arch let in the wall we noticed a stone inscribed P. M. 1577. Wansford is curiously called locally "Wansford in

England" and has been so called for generations. In my copy of *Drunken Barnaby's four journeys to the North of England*, edition of 1778, I find the following lines :—

> Thence to Wansforth-brigs . . .
> . . . . .
> On a haycock sleeping soundly,
> Th' River rose and took me roundly
> Down the Current : People cry'd
> Sleeping down the stream I hy'd :
> *Where away*, quoth they, *from Greenland ?*
> *No ; from Wansforth brigs in England.*

Now we hastened along to "Stamford town," some six miles farther on, where we proposed to spend the night. Just before we reached our destination we passed to our right Burleigh park and house. Of the latter we had a good view : a splendid pile it is, stately but not too stately, dignified yet homelike, it combines picturesqueness with grandeur—a rare and difficult achievement for any architect and one for which Vanbrugh strove in vain ; the more merit therefore to the famous John Thorpe who designed Burleigh House, in my humble opinion the greatest of English architects ; his works speak his praises. The man who originated the Elizabethan style of architecture was no ordinary genius ! Thorpe built pictures, he was never commonplace.

My readers will remember Tennyson's well-known lines about the "Lord of Burleigh" and his village spouse ; unfortunately, like the charming story of Dorothy Vernon's elopement, the romance

loses much of its gilt by too critical an examination. The lovely and loving Countess was the Lord's second wife, he having married another lady from whom he was divorced. After the separation, acting upon the advice of his uncle, and having lost all his own fortune, he retired into the country and eventually took lodgings with a farmer named Thomas Hoggins at Bolas in Shropshire, giving himself out to be a certain Mr. Jones, not an uncommon name. Here "Mr. Jones," possibly finding time hanging heavily on his hands, promptly made love to his landlord's daughter Sarah, the village beauty, and eventually married her. It was not till after the death of his uncle that he became "Lord of Burleigh," all of which is a matter of history. It was after this event, when he succeeded to the Earldom and estates, that his rank was revealed, much in the romantic manner that Tennyson relates. Then the new "Lord of Burleigh" took his innocent and loving wife by easy stages to her home, pointing out all the country sights and mansions on the way, she dreaming all the while of the little cottage he so long had promised her—

All he shows her makes him dearer:
  Evermore she seems to gaze
On that cottage growing nearer,
  Where they twain will spend their days.

. . . . . .

Thus her heart rejoices greatly,
  Till a gateway she discerns
With armorial bearings stately,
  And beneath the gate she turns;
Sees a mansion more majestic
  Than all those she saw before:

Many a gallant gay domestic
Bows before him at the door.
And they speak in gentle murmur,
When they answer to his call,
While he treads with footstep firmer,
Leading on from hall to hall.
And, while now she wonders blindly,
Nor the meaning can divine,
Proudly turns he round and kindly,
"All of this is mine and thine."

Driving into Stamford, a place we had never visited before, we were struck by the familiarity of the townscape presented to us; it seemed to greet us like an old friend, whose face we had often seen. The square towers, the tall tapering spires, with the gable-fronted, mullion-windowed old houses, and the picturesque way that these towers, steeples, and old-fashioned houses were grouped and contrasted had a strangely well-known look—yet how could this be if we had not beheld them before? Then we suddenly solved the promising mystery by remembering that it was Turner's engraved drawing of Stamford in his "England and Wales" series of views that had brought the prospect to mind. In this case—judging by our recollection of the engraving, a great favourite, so strongly impressed upon us—Turner has been more than usually topographically faithful: he appears to have taken very little, if any, liberty with the buildings or the composition of the subject—possibly because the natural grouping is so good, that art could not, for the nonce, improve picturesquely upon fact. For it is not the province of true art to be realistic, but

to be poetic; the painter is not a mere transcriber, but a translator. There is such a thing as pictorial poetry; the pencil can, and should, be employed sincerely yet romantically. Observe, in this very drawing of Stamford, how Turner, whilst not departing one whit from the truth, has by the perfectly possible, yet wonderful, sky-scape he has introduced, with the effective play of light and shade that would be caused thereby, strong yet not forced, and the happy arrangement of figures and the old coach in the foreground, added the grace of poetry to the natural charms of the ordinary street scene. The photograph can give us hard facts and precise details, enough and to spare, yet somehow to the artistic soul the finest photographs have a want, they are purely mechanical, soulless, and unromantic. They lack the glamour of the painter's vision, who gives us the gold and is blind to the dross, he looks for the beautiful and finds it; so he brightens his own life and those of others, and his work is not in vain!

Scott, who often travelled by this famous Great North Road, described St. Mary's Hill at Stamford as being "the finest street between London and Edinburgh," and surely Scott ought to know! To use an artist's slang expression of a good subject "it takes a lot of beating." Besides being beautiful, Stamford is one of the most interesting towns in England, with quite a character of its own; it is essentially individual, and therein lies its special charm: to me it is passing strange that such a picturesque and quaint old town should be so

neglected by the tourist, and the few who do find their way thither appear to come attracted solely by the fame of Burleigh House, one of the "show" mansions of the country, merely treating old-world Stamford, with all its wealth of antiquarian and archæological interest, as a point of departure and arrival. For Stamford—whose name is derived we were told from "Stone-ford," as that of Oxford is from "Ox-ford" over the Isis—was erst a university town of renown whose splendid colleges rivalled both those of Oxford and Cambridge, and even at one period threatened to supersede them, and probably would have done so but for powerful and interested political intrigues. Of these ancient colleges there are some small but interesting remains. Spenser in his *Faerie Queene* thus alludes to the town :—

> Stamford, though now homely hid,
> Then shone in learning more than ever did
> Cambridge or Oxford, England's goodly beams.

But besides the remains of its ancient colleges, Stamford possesses several fine old churches of exceptional interest, a number of quaint old hospitals, or "callises" as they are locally called—a term derived, we were informed by a Stamford antiquary we met by chance, from the famous wool merchants of "the Staple of Calais" who first founded them here—the important ruins of St. Leonard's Priory, crumbling old gateways, bits of Norman arches, countless ancient houses of varied character, and quaint odds and ends of architecture scattered about.

At Stamford we patronised the ancient and historic "George Inn," that still stands where it did of yore—an inn which has entertained generations of wayfarers of various degrees from king to highwayman; and, as in the past, opens its doors to the latter-day traveller, who, however, seldom arrives by road. It was quite in keeping with the old traditions of the place that we should drive into its ancient and spacious courtyard and hand our horses over to the ostler's charge, whilst we two dust-stained travellers, having seen our baggage taken out of the dog-cart, should follow it indoors, where the landlord stood ready to welcome us, just as former landlords on the self-same spot might have welcomed former travellers posting across country. During the month of August 1645, Charles I. slept a night here on his way south from Newark; it was Scott's favourite halting-place on his many journeys to and from London —and many other notables, of whom the list is long, have feasted and slept beneath the sign of the "George" at Stamford. "Walls have ears," says the old familiar proverb: would that the walls of the "George" had tongues to tell us something of the people who have rested and feasted within its ancient chambers, to repeat for our benefit the unrecorded sayings, witticisms, stories of strange adventures on the king's highway, and aught else of interest that may have passed their lips. Marvellous men were some of those ancestors of ours, who would sit outside a coach all day, and sit up half the night consuming their three bottles

of port, yet rise in the morning headacheless and proceed with their journey smiling. There must be some wonderful recuperative virtue about life in the open air, otherwise they could hardly have led the life they did. Up early, and to bed late, with port, or punch, nearly every night, and sometimes both—and yet we have no record of their complaining of dyspepsia! Again I repeat they were marvellous men; peace be to their ashes.

In many a coaching inn they have left mementoes of themselves by scratching their names with dates, and sometimes with added verses, on the window panes of the rooms: these always deeply interest and appeal to me; they tell so little and so much! The mere scratches of a diamond on the fragile glass have been preserved all those years, they look so fresh they might have been done only a month ago. Nowadays it is only the "'Arrys" who are supposed to do this sort of thing, but in the olden times even notable personages did not deem it beneath their dignity thus to record their names. On the window of the room in which Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon may be found the genuine signature of the "Wizard of the North," in company with those of other famed and unfamed men and women. Where walls are silent, windows sometimes speak! I have noted dates on these of nearly two centuries ago; the names of the writers being thus unwittingly preserved whilst perchance they have weathered away from their tombstones. Such records as the following which I select haphazard from my note-book are interesting:—"Peter

Lewis 1735. Weather-bound," or "G. L. stopped on the heath by three men," or again, "T. Lawes, 1765. Flying machine broken down, Vile roades." Suggestive comments that one can enlarge and romance upon. Now and then these old-time travellers instead of leaving their names behind them indulged their artistic propensities by drawing, more or less roughly, representations of coats-of-arms, and crests, or else gibbets, highwaymen, and such like. These old records on glass are an interesting study, and are mostly to be found on bedroom windows; but panes get broken in time, or destroyed during alterations, or the old houses themselves get improved away, so these reminders of past days and changed conditions of life and travel gradually grow fewer: it is therefore wise of the curious to make note of them when they can.

In the coffee-room of the "George" we met a pleasant company consisting of three belated cyclists, and with them we chatted of roads, of scenery, and many things besides till a late hour, when we retired to rest and found that we had allotted to us a large front bedroom. We could not help wondering how many other travellers, and who they might have been, the same chamber had sheltered since the inn was first established in the years gone by. Probably—it was even more than probable—Scott himself may have slept in the very chamber we occupied. Verily a glamour of the long ago, a past presence, seems to hang over this ancient and historic hostelry! It is haunted with memories!

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CHAPTER VIII

A picturesque ruin—Round about Stamford—Browne's "Callis"—A chat with an antiquary—A quaint interior—"Bull-running"—A relic of a destroyed college—An old Carmelite gateway—A freak of Nature—Where Charles I. last slept as a free man—A storied ceiling—A gleaner's bell—St. Leonard's Priory—Tennyson's county—In time of vexation—A flood—Hiding-holes—Lost!—Memorials of the past.

Early in the morning we started out to explore the town; first, however, we found our way to Wothorpe a short mile off, from whence there is a fine view of Stamford. At Wothorpe are the picturesque ruins of a small mansion built by the first Earl of Exeter: "to retire out of the dust," as he playfully remarked, "whilst his great house at Burleigh was a-sweeping." The deserted and time-rent mansion is finely built of carefully squared stones and has four towers one at each corner, square at the base, but octagonal at the top; these towers, judging from an old print we saw in a shop window at Stamford, were formerly capped by shaped stone roofs, which in turn were surmounted by great weathercocks: the towers when complete must have been quite a feature in the structure, and have given it a special character—a touch of quaintness that is always so charming and attractive in a building. The ruins

are weather-toned and ivy-grown and make a very pretty picture, though only the outer crumbling walls remain. Wothorpe has arrived at such a pathetic state of decay as to be almost picturesquely perfect, and pleads to be admired! Man has ruined it, but nature left to work her own sweet will has beautified it, for she has draped it with greenery, has tinted its stones, and broken up its rigid symmetry. It is a sad thought that a building should be more beautiful in ruin than in its perfect state, but, as Byron says,

> there is a power
> And magic in the ruin'd battlement,
> For which the palace of the present hour
> Must yield its pomp, and wait till ages are its dower.

From this spot we retraced our steps to Stamford, and wandering desultorily about the town eventually came upon Browne's Hospital, Bede House, or Callis; a most interesting old building, the exterior of which suggested to us a quaint interior, so we determined to obtain a glimpse of the latter, if possible. As we were ascending the steps to inquire if the place were shown we encountered a gentleman coming down, whom instinctively we took to be an antiquary; though why we should have jumped at such a conclusion it would be hard to say; and oddly enough it turned out that we were correct in our conjectures, so we ventured to ask him whether he thought we should be able to obtain admittance to the building. There is nothing lost in this world by seizing opportunities and asking polite questions, for oftentimes the traveller gains

much thereby. In this case we were well rewarded for making so simple an inquiry, for the stranger, noting the interest we took in the fine old building, appeared forthwith to take an interest in us, and thereupon offered to show us over it himself—a civil word how profitable it sometimes is!—he even appeared to enjoy his self-imposed task of doing duty as a guide. Possibly it pleased him to have a talk with a sympathetic soul as it did another antiquary we met later on, who on parting with us jokingly remarked: "It has been a treat to exchange views with a brother lunatic!" so bearing this in mind we chatted with our new friend about things old, of bygone times, and of antiquarian-lore galore—for he was a man whose life seemed in the past, his conversation gave one the impression that he was born at least a century too late for his own pleasure. The result of our discourse was that on leaving the hospital we had so gained his good-will that he further offered to show us something of the town, "As strangers might readily miss so much, and I should like to point out to you a few of the chief objects of interest"; then he added, "It will not be any trouble to me; I've nothing particular to do this morning." We were only too glad to accept his kind aid, and greatly did we enjoy our exploration of Stamford under his helpful guidance.

But to "hark back" a little. Upon entering the old hospital our attention was called to the carved stone figure of the founder over the doorway, where he is shown holding a plan of the building in his hands. Then we were led into a

large, long hall having a heavy oak-beamed ceiling. Here originally (I am now quoting from the notes I made on the spot of what we were told) the poor inmates slept in cubicles, access to which was gained by a gangway down the centre of the hall. Now that the old folk have sleeping accommodation in another portion of the hospital, the floor has been tiled, and the tiles are so laid as to show the shape, size, and plan of the cubicles. A very excellent idea—if changes must be made. Some ancient stained glass in a window here has "the founder's chief crest" painted thereon, "for the founder's family had the right to use two crests; only two other families in England having this right." The "chief crest" is a phœnix, it is placed over a coat-of-arms on which three teasels are shown (these teasels puzzled us until our friend explained what they were). The motto given is "*X me sped*," "Christ me speed," we Anglicised it. An old "grid-iron" table of the time of Charles I. stood, when we were there, in the centre of the hall; the ends of this draw out to extend it—an idea that the modern furniture manufacturer might well consider as a possible improvement upon the usual troublesome leaves and screw, nor prize it the less because so long invented. I have a table made in a similar fashion and find it most useful; two rings forming handles to pull out the ends.

Then we came to the chapel, divided from the hall by a carved oak screen; all the inmates are compelled to attend service here twice a day. The large chapel window, with a high transom, is filled

with fine old stained glass, on a bit of which we discerned the date 1515. The bench-ends are good. As well as these we had pointed out to us in its original position the pre-Reformation altar-stone, distinguished by the usual five crosses upon it. At one side of the altar was an ancient "cope-chair, in this the priest sat down, his cope covering the chair, and from it he blessed the congregation. There were formerly two of these chairs, but one was stolen"! Then we were shown a rare old wooden alms-box of the fifteenth century; this was bound round with iron.

In the quaint old audit room over the hall, where we went next, painted on a wooden panel set in the centre end of the wall we found the following ancient inscription, commencing in Latin and ending in English :—

Haec Domus Eleemosynaria fundata
Fuit a Guilielmo Browne
Anno Doñi 1495. Anno Regio Henrici
VII Decimo

This structure new contains twelve habitations
Which shall remain for future generations
For old and poore, for weake and men unhealthy.
This blessed house was founded not for wealthy.
Hee that endowed for aye and this house builded.
By this good act hath to sinne pardon yielded.
The honour of the country and this towne
Alas now dead his name was William Browne.
Be it an house of prayer and to diuine
Duties devoted else not called mine.

Ten old men and two old women are boarded and cared for here, we learnt; the women having to act

as nurses if required. Outside the building away from the road is a very picturesque and quiet court-yard with cloisters; these seem verily to enclose an old-world atmosphere, a calm that is of another century. The wall-girt stillness, the profound peace of the place made so great an impression on us that for the moment the throbbing and excited nineteenth century seemed ages removed, as though the present were a fevered dream and only existed in our imagination. So do certain spots enthral one with the sentiment of the far-away both in time and space! From here there is a view to be had of a gable end of the founder's house; the greater part of the building having been pulled down, and only this small portion remaining.

The broad street outside Browne's "Callis" was, we were told, the opening scene of the bull-running. Most towns in past days, as is well known, indulged in the "gentle sport" of bull-baiting, but from time immemorial in Stamford bull-running took its place as an institution peculiar to the town. The bull-running, we were told, was carried on, more or less, in the following fashion. Early in the morning of the day devoted to the "gentle sport" a bell-man went round to warn all people to shut their shops, doors, gates, etc., then afterwards at a certain hour a wild bull, the wilder the better, was let loose into the streets and then the sport began. The populace, men, women, and boys, ran after the bull, armed with cudgels, with which they struck it and goaded it to fury; all the dogs of the town, needless to say, joining in the

sport and adding to the medley. By evening if the bull were not killed, or driven into the river and perchance drowned, he was despatched by an axe. Men occasionally of course got tossed, or gored, during these disgusting and lively proceedings, and others were injured in various ways: indeed it seems to have been very much like a Spanish bull-fight vulgarised. This sport continued till about the year 1838. I presume that there was no "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" then; or is it that cruelty does not count when sport comes in? for as a supporter of the Society once laid down the law to me dogmatically thus: "It's cruelty to thrash a horse, even if he be vicious, but it's not cruelty to hunt a fox or a hare, as that is sport; so we never interfere with hunting: neither is bull-fighting cruel, for that is a sport." Well, my favourite sport is fly-fishing, and I am glad to learn that it is not a cruel one, as "fish have no feelings." But how about the boy who impales a worm on a hook: has the worm conveniently "no feelings" too? Shall we ever have a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Reptiles?

The origin of the Stamford bull-running appears to be lost in the mists of antiquity; of course where history fails legend must step in, and according to legend the sport began thus: — Some time in the thirteenth century (delightfully vague date! why not openly "once upon a time"?) a wild bull got out of the meadows where it was grazing near the town and rushed into the streets; it was chased by the populace, and chased by dogs, and eventually

driven into the river and drowned, after affording much entertainment to the townsfolk; thereupon the bull-running was established as a sport. The legend does not sound so improbable as some legends do, but whether based on fact or not I cannot say. It is only for me to repeat stories as they come to my ear.

In the same street outside Browne's "Callis," we further learnt, the old market cross stood which was taken down about the year 1790. According to ancient engravings it appears to have been a structure with a tall stone shaft in the centre, surmounted by a cross which was duly knocked off by the Puritans; from this central shaft a roof extended to a number of columns around, thus forming a shelter for the market folk. This market cross is not to be confounded with a Queen Eleanor's Cross that stood beyond the Scot-Gate about half a mile from Stamford on the old York and Edinburgh road. A glorious example, this latter must have been, of one of these picturesque crosses erected in pious memory of a loved consort, judging at least from a description of it we observed quoted in a local guide-book we found in our hotel, which runs thus:—"A vision of beauty, glorious with its aggregate of buttresses and niches and diaper, and above all with the statues of Eleanor and Edward; the most beautiful of that or any age. Shame to those savages in the Great Rebellion who swept away the very foundations of it! But the cry of superstition hunts down such things as these a great deal faster than age can despatch them."

Next our guide took us to the site of Brasenose College—mostly pulled down in the seventeenth century by the corporation—but the outer wall and an arched stone gateway still remain. On the gate here was a quaint and ancient knocker, judged by antiquaries to be of the fourteenth century; this was formed of a lion's head in beaten brass holding a ring in his mouth; we understood that it had left the town, a fact to be regretted. It is singular that there should have been a college here of the curious name of Brasenose, as well as the one at Oxford. There is indeed a tradition that the veritable nose that surmounts the gateway at Oxford came from the Stamford college, and was brought by the students when compelled to return to their former university town. Another tradition professes to give the origin of the peculiar name, stating it to be derived from *brasen-hus*, or *hws*, a brew-house, it being said that one was attached to the college —but the derivation, though just possible, is more ingenious than convincing.

Next we were taken to see the crumbling gateway of the ancient Carmelite Friary; this had three niches for statues above, but is more interesting to antiquaries than to the lovers of the picturesque; it now forms the approach to the Infirmary. Then we visited the three chief churches, noting in St. Martin's the magnificent altar-tomb—gorgeous with colour and gilt, but rather dusty when we were there—of Queen Elizabeth's Lord Treasurer, whereon he is represented in recumbent effigy clad in elaborately adorned armour. Men dressed their

parts in those days! Space will not permit a detailed description of these historic fanes; indeed, to do Stamford justice would take at least several chapters, and I have not even one to spare!

Next our wanderings led us into an old graveyard to see the last resting-place of a famous Stamford native, whose size was his fame! His tombstone inscription tells its own story without any further comment of mine, and thus it runs:—

In Remembrance of
That Prodigy in Nature
DANIEL LAMBERT
who was possessed of
An exalted and convivial mind
And in personal greatness
Had no Competitor
He measured three feet one inch round the leg
Nine feet four inches round the body
And Weighed
Fifty-two stone Eleven pounds!
He departed this life
On the 21st of June
1803
Aged 39 years.

"An exalted and convivial mind" is good, it is a phrase worth noting. Our good-natured guide informed us that after the death of this worthy citizen his stockings were kept for many years hung up in a room of one of the inns as a curiosity, and that he distinctly remembered being taken there by his father when a boy, and being placed inside one of the stockings.

After this in a different part of the town we had

pointed out to us "Barn Hill House," an old gray stone building more interesting historically than architecturally, for it was within its walls that Charles I. slept his last night "as a free man." He arrived there disguised as a servant, and entered by the back-door—a hunted king! Such are the chances and changes of fate: the ruler of a kingdom coming stealthily in by a back-door, and seeking shelter and safety in the house of a humble subject, clad in the lowly garb of a serving-man! But I am moralising, a thing I dislike when others do it! possibly through having an overdose thereof when I was a boy, for almost every book I had, it seemed to me, concluded with a moral; till at last, I remember, I used first to look at the end of any new work that was given to me, and if I found the expected moral there, I troubled it no further!

We were shown much more of interest in Stamford, a town every square yard of which is history; but space forbids a detailed description of all we saw. One old house we were taken over had a very quaint and finely-enriched plaster ceiling, for builders of ancient homes did not believe in a flat void of whitewash. The ornaments of this ceiling were rendered in deep relief, the chief amongst them being animals playfully arranged; for instance there was, I remember, a goose in the centre of one panel with a fox greedily watching it on either side; another panel showed a poor mouse with two cats eyeing it on either hand; then there was a hare similarly gloated over by two hounds; and so forth. We visited the site of the castle and saw the last

bit of crumbling wall left of the once imposing stronghold, also the small remains of old St. Stephen's gate: then we returned to our hotel, our good-natured antiquarian friend still keeping us company.

Reaching the bridge that crosses the Welland river, which structure has taken the place of the "stone-ford," we had pointed out to us a line marked upon it with an inscription, showing the height of the water at the spot during the memorable flood of 15th July 1880, when the swollen river rose above the arches of the bridge. On that occasion, we learnt, our inn was flooded, the water reaching even to the top of the billiard-table. During a former great flood in the seventeenth century, we were told, the horses in the "George" stables were actually drowned at their stalls.

At our inn we reluctantly parted company with our entertaining companion, not, however, before we had thanked him for his kindness to us as strangers. It is these pleasant chance acquaintances the wanderer so frequently makes that add a wonderful zest to the pleasures of travel.

The sign of the "George" inn, as of old, still hangs from the centre of a beam that stretches right across the roadway; it is said that there are only some twenty-five or twenty-seven signs remaining in England so arranged. At the village of Barley in Herts, on the highway from London to Cambridge, the "Fox and Hounds" possesses one of these signs. Here may be seen figures of huntsmen, hounds, and fox, represented as crossing the

beam in full cry; the fox apparently just escaping into the thatched roof of the inn, the hounds immediately following, whilst the merry huntsmen bring up the rear. This very sporting sign shows well, being strongly silhouetted against the sky; it is full of spirit and movement, and has the charm of originality.

I have forgotten to say we were told that at the village of Ketton, in the near neighbourhood of Stamford, a gleaners' bell used to be rung in due season, as well as the curfew; before the first ringing of the former no one might glean in the fields, nor after the second ringing was any one allowed to continue their gleaning under the penalty of a fine, which went to the ringers. I trust I need not apologise for making note of these old customs, from time to time, as I come upon them. The church at Ketton is considered to be the most beautiful in the county; it has a central tower with a broach spire, and has been compared with St. Mary's at Stamford: the saying being that the latter "has the more dignity, but Ketton the greater grace."

Before resuming our journey I may note that in the heyday of the coaching age, I find from an old "Way Bill" that the time allowed for the mail-coach from London to Stamford—89¼ miles—was 9 hours and 20 minutes, including changes.

Early next morning we set out from our ancient hostelry bound for Spalding, with the intention of visiting the once far-famed Fenland abbey of Crowland on the way, though from our map it appeared that the roads and the dykes were rather mixed up,

and our route thither was not at all easy to trace ; nor was the information we obtained at Stamford very helpful : "It's a good road as far as Market Deeping," we were told, "but beyond that you'll have to find your way." The worthy landlord of the "George" came to the door to see us off, and right sorry we felt to leave our genial host, comfortable quarters, and the interesting and historic town of Stamford that bade us such a pleasant welcome into Lincolnshire.

In about a mile, or less, as we drove on we espied some picturesque and important-looking ecclesiastical ruins ; these we found to be the remains of the nave of St. Leonard's Priory, now debased, part into a barn and part into a shed ; and what a substantial barn the solid Norman work made ! fit to last for centuries still, if let alone ; and the shed upheld by the massive Norman pillars, between which the shafts of farm carts, and sundry agricultural implements peeped forth—what a grand shed it was ! It is not always that a farmer has his out-buildings constructed by Norman masons ! The west front of the Priory is happily little changed from its original state, the great arched doorway and windows above being built up, but nothing more ; the arches are elaborately decorated, and suggest that when the whole was complete it must have been a fine specimen of Late Norman work. What a pity it is that such picturesque and interesting relics of the past are not carefully preserved as ruins, instead of being patched up and altered to serve purely utilitarian purposes. The ruin of a fine

building like this, raised by skilled and pious hands for the glory of God and not for the profit of man, should be a prized possession and left to Mother Nature's gentle care, which is far less destructive than man's hands—even the restorers! There are many things to be done in the world, but you cannot convert the nave of a stately priory, hallowed by the worship within its walls of departed humanity, into a barn and a cart-shed consistently!

Now we entered upon a very pleasant stretch of greenful country, seeming doubly pleasant under the glamour of that soft sunshiny morning—a morning upon which the atmosphere was permeated with light, causing the grassy meadows and leafy trees to put on a rare, rich golden-green, as though glowing with brightness. Only under special conditions of weather and time shall you look upon scenery thus glorified. To slightly alter Wordsworth, such is—

> The light that seldom is on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the Poet's dream.

The blue sky overhead flecked with the lightest of summer clouds, the buoyant air, the sun-steeped landscape, the general brightness and cheerfulness of the day, impressed us with an indefinable but very real joyousness and light-heartedness. We felt in truth, just then, that the world was a very pleasant place to live in, and that especial corner of it known as England the pleasantest part thereof. Then, as we drove lazily on half lost in the luxury of day-

dreaming—a very lotus-eaters' land it seemed to be that soft and slumberous morning—some chance drifting of thought called to mind William Hazlitt's remarks anent a walking tour, a recreation in which he delighted: "Give me," says he, connoisseur of good things that he was, "the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner . . . then I laugh, I leap, I sing for joy." Well, we could not readily run, nor yet leap, as we were driving and in a quiet mood moreover, neither did we sing for joy; not that we took our pleasures sadly, but rather for the hour did we delight in a drowsy progress soothed into untold rest by the peace-bestowing quietude that prevailed all around: our happiness was too real to need any outward display, which but too often disturbs the deep repose of absolute content. Such a sensation of inward satisfaction with oneself and one's surroundings comes not every day, not even with searching after, but when it comes it makes one thankfully realise the full meaning of—

> that blessed mood
> In which the burden of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened.

Uffington, the first village on our way, proved to be a remarkably picturesque one, clean and neat, with solid stone-built cottages, some roofed with homely thatch, others with gray stone slabs, and all looking pictures of contentment—let us hope

A QUIET COUNTRY ROAD.

it was not only looking! Soon after this we reached a roadside inn with a swinging sign-board that proclaimed it to be "The Tennyson's Arms," where we also learnt that we could quench our thirst with "strong ales." This somehow called to mind another notice we saw at a country "public" elsewhere to this effect: "Ales and spirits sold here; also genuine English brandy." The last item was distinctly novel! "The Tennyson's Arms" reminded us that we were in the county that gave the great Victorian poet birth.

Next we came to Tallington, another clean and picturesque village: two desirable qualities that unhappily do not always go together. There we stopped to sketch and photograph a large stone-built pigeon-house that would hold a little army of birds, which stood in an old farmyard; a fierce-looking bull bellowing a loud disapproval of our proceedings—across a strong high fence.

Beyond Tallington we somehow got off our road and found ourselves in the remote and sleepy hamlet of Barholm, an uninteresting spot. On the tower of the church here, however, about half-way up, we observed a stone slab with a rather quaint inscription thereon that we made out, with some difficulty, to be—

> Was ever such a thing
> Since the Creation
> A new steeple built
> In time of vexation . . . 1648.

Then by cross-country crooked ways we reached Market Deeping, a sleepy, decayed little town,

whose first name is now a misnomer, as the market is no more. The low-lying level country all around here, we learnt, was under water during the great flood of 1880, when the corn-fields were so flooded that only the tops of the ears of grain showed, and the ducks swam three to four feet above what is now dry land—a great event in local annals that even now affords a subject for local gossip. Such notable occurrences give the rural folk a time to reckon from, more to their liking than any date. "It were the year after the big flood," or "Three years afore the flood," and so forth, are the remarks that may frequently be heard. To a stranger in these parts, unaware of past happenings, it sounds curious to listen to some such saying as this: "I minds my father telling me, who died just afore the flood," for to the average stranger "the flood" suggests the Biblical one, and that was some time ago now!

From Market Deeping to Deeping St. James—another old decayed town that looks as out-of-the-world and forsaken as though nothing would ever happen again there—was but a short distance, our road following the bends of the winding river Welland to our right, the air blowing refreshingly cool on our faces from the gliding water. So picturesque was the river-side with bordering old trees, cottages, and buildings, tumbling weir, which made a pleasing liquid melody on the quiet air, and wooden foot-bridge, that we were tempted to stop a while and sketch it. At Deeping St. James we noticed as we passed by its grand old church, whose dusky and

crumbling walls tell the tale of the long centuries it has bravely weathered. Near to this ancient fane, in a wide space where three roads meet, stands a market cross apparently reconstructed from old material, presumably that of the fine Perpendicular Cross that is recorded to have stood somewhere here in past days.

Our antiquarian friend at Stamford had told us that shortly after leaving "the Deepings" we should pass close to the roadside an ideal old manor-house with a gateway-house in front, and having mullioned windows, courtyard, great hall, oak screen, with quaint and characteristic architectural details, that made it a most interesting place. "You *must* see it," he exclaimed after enlarging rapturously upon its rare beauties: a skeleton, he further informed us, had recently been found in the roof there, supposed to be that of a man stowed away and starved in a hiding-hole — without which advantage no old home of any pretensions was considered complete. Strange to say, even only the other day an architect of standing confided to me that more than once recently he had been called upon to provide a secret chamber in large houses he was employed to design: the real reason for this curious demand it would be interesting to know. I have seen quite a modern country house with a well-planned secret hiding-place, and the amount of ingenuity displayed in the contriving of this excited my utmost admiration. But why such things in the close of the nineteenth century?

The charming word-pictures of this old home,

within and without, had raised both our expectations and curiosity. "You cannot possibly miss it," we had been assured; nevertheless we did so most successfully, much to our regret and disappointment; in fact, to own the truth, we did not so much as obtain even a glimpse of it. This was exceedingly provoking; indeed, the roads about were very puzzling: they were very lonely also, for we never came across a soul of whom to ask the way. The country was a dead level and the hedges were high, so that we could not see much beyond the roadway; it was like being in a maze, the point being to find the old manor-house. Then it struck us as being rather a poor joke to say that we could not possibly miss it! Could we not? Why, we did so quite easily! Then we remembered that we had been told at Stamford that we should have to drive through the village of Peakirk to get to Crowland, and that we could not by any chance get there without so doing. But somehow again we managed to accomplish the impossible, for we eventually got to Crowland, but we never went through Peakirk or any other village. The state of affairs was this, that we had lost our way, there was no one about to put us right, sign-posts we looked for in vain, or if we found one it was past service: so we simply drove eastwards as far as we could, trusting to fate. Fortunately the day was fine, and time was not pressing; indeed, we rather enjoyed the delightful uncertainties of our position. We presumed that we should arrive somewhere at last, and that was enough for us. There is a sort of fascination in

being lost at times—otherwise why do people go into mazes.

Just about here, it must be confessed, our map failed us; indeed, I am inclined to think that it omitted some of the roads altogether: quite possibly the engraver may have confused them with the river or the innumerable dykes that intersect the land in every direction. The more we studied the map the more confused we became, till we folded it up and put it carefully away, lest it should cause us to use bad language. A map that fails, just when you most need its guidance, what a temper-trying thing it is! However, a gentleman we met later on during our tour had something more temper-trying to contend with: it appeared that he started out touring in a motor-car, and the thing broke down utterly, on an unsheltered stretch of road in the midst of a drenching thunderstorm, so that he had to beg the loan of a horse from a farmer to get the machine housed. To make the matter worse, some of the people thought it a matter to laugh over, to see a horse lugging the helpless motor along; but remembering that horses sometimes go lame on a journey (though whilst touring we have never been delayed by such a mishap), we sympathised with our fellow-wayfarer.

Before we put our map away, however, a close scrutiny of it revealed to us two spots marked with a cross, and after each cross the legends respectively of "Kenulph's Stone" and "St. Guthlak's Cross." The former of these was one of the four boundary stones of "the halidome" of the Abbey, and may still be found by the side of the Welland; the broken

shaft of the latter, with curious lettering thereon, is also to be seen at Crowland. According to learned antiquaries the lettering forms the following Latin inscription :—"*Aio hanc petram Guthlacvs habet sibi metam.*"

CHAPTER IX

A land of dykes—Fenland rivers—Crowland Abbey—A unique triangular bridge—Antiquaries differ—A mysterious statue—A medieval rhyme—A wayside inscription—The scenery of the Fens—Light-hearted travellers—Cowbit—A desolate spot—An adventure on the road—A Dutch-like town.

So we drove on till the tall hedgerows ceased and the country became more open and assumed a wilder aspect: narrow dykes or ditches now divided the fields instead of the familiar fences, so that our eyes could range unimpeded over the wide landscape. Then presently, as we proceeded, a high and long grass-grown embankment came into view, right in front of us, and so our prospect ahead was suddenly shut in, reduced from miles to yards! Approaching close to this embankment, we found that our road turned sharply to the left and ran immediately below and alongside of it. Here we pulled up and scrambled to the top of the steep bank, just "to see what was on the other side." The mystery of the vast earthwork was solved: it was no Brobdingnagian railway scheme, but an earthwork constructed to keep the river Welland in bounds when flooded, though just then the river flowed sluggishly along, deep down below its high-banked sides, as innocent-looking a stream as could well be imagined.

One striking peculiarity of the Fenland rivers is that they are mostly held in thus by banks and are not allowed, as English rivers generally are, the liberty to meander about at their own sweet will; for in these parts the primary use of a river appears to be to do duty as a mighty drainage dyke, and this curbing of wilful nature gives such rivers an exceedingly artificial and somewhat tame look. Quaint to English eyes is it to observe these great river-banks standing high above the surrounding country and highways, for often, for convenience of construction, do the roads follow the course of the streams and water-ways. Well is this division of Lincolnshire called "Holland" or "Holland in England," as some maps have it. Indeed, this mighty level land, now smiling with yellow corn-crops and rich green pastures, was erst a swampy waste, more water than land; fit only to be the home of wildfowl and coarse fish, till sundry Dutch engineers undertook to reclaim it, importing their own countrymen to assist in the task. We were told by a Lincolnshire man that several of the Dutch workmen never returned home, but settled and married in the new "Holland in England" that their labours had helped to create; furthermore, we were told that a goodly number of purely Dutch names still existed in the county.

After following along and below the embankment for a mile or more, our road took to itself a sudden whim and boldly mounted to the top of the bank which was wide enough to drive upon, and from our elevated position we had a space-expressing prospect over a level country, reaching all round to the long,

low circling line of the bounding horizon. Though we could not have been raised much above sea-level, still I have climbed high mountains for a far inferior view. It is not the height one may be above a scene that gives the observer therefrom the best impression of it; indeed one may easily be elevated too far above scenery to appreciate it properly. A bird's-eye view of a landscape is not the one an artist would select to paint; there is such a thing as a picturesque and an unpicturesque way of looking on an object. Sometimes, truly, scenery has been painted as a bird sees it, for the sake of novelty; but novelty is not synonymous with beauty: they may join hands at times, but as a rule they are utter strangers one to another.

Then as we drove slowly and carefully on—for there were no fences to the road on either side and it was not over safe to approach too near the edges, or we might have been precipitated into the river on one hand, or on to the fields below on the other, either of which events would have brought our outing to a sudden termination—as we drove thus cautiously on, the one remaining tower and great vacant arch-way of Crowland's lonely abbey came into sight, standing out a tender pearly-gray mass against the sunlit sky: in all the ocean of greenery round about there was nothing else in sight that raised itself noticeably above the general level.

There was something very impressive in this first view of the ancient fane, rising in crumbling yet solemn majesty out of the ever-green world below; a poem in stone, laden with ancient legend

and fraught with misty history. It was a scene for a pilgrim, pregnant with peacefulness, and as lovely as a dream. Yet how simple was the prospect—a gray and ruined abbey, a silent world of green suffused with faint sunshine that filtered through the thin clouds above! Below us and before us stretched the river gleaming for miles between its sloping banks, winding away towards the picturesque pile of ancient devotion in curving parallels that narrowed toward the distant horizon to a mere point; and this describes all that was before us!

After the abbey's pathetic ruins, beautiful with the beauty of decay, what most struck us was the sense of solitude, silence, and space in our surroundings. On every side the level Fenland stretched broad as the sea, and to the eye appearing almost as wide and as free; and from all this vast lowland tract came no sound except the hardly to be distinguished mellow murmuring of the wind amongst the nearer sedges and trees. The river flowed on below us in sluggish contentment without even an audible gurgle; no birds were singing, and, as far as we could see, there were no birds to sing; and in the midst of this profound stillness our very voices seemed preternaturally loud. There are two such things as a cheerful silence and a depressing silence; the difference between these two is more to be felt than described: of course all silence is relative, for such a thing as absolute silence is not to be found in this world; but the quietude of the Fens, like that of the mountain-top, simulates the latter very successfully. The thick atmosphere about us had

the effect of subduing sounds doubtless, whilst it held the light, as it were, in suspense, and magnified and mystified the distance. The profound quietude prevailing suggested to us that we were travelling through an enchanted land where all things slept —a land laid under some mighty magic spell.

As we proceeded along our level winding way, with the river for silent company, the outline of the ruined abbey gradually increased in size, and presently we found ourselves in the remote out-of-the-world village of Crowland—or Croyland as some writers have it; but I understand that certain antiquaries who have studied the subject declare that the latter appellation is quite wrong, and as they may be right I accept their dictum and spell it Crowland with my map, though, authorities and map aside, I much prefer Croyland as the quainter title.

The inhabitants appear to spell the name of their village indifferently both ways. One intelligent native, of whom we sought enlightenment, said he did not care "a turn of the weathercock" which way it was spelt, which was not very helpful; but we were grateful for the expression "a turn of the weathercock," as it was fresh to us. He further remarked, apropos of nothing in our conversation, "You might as well try to get feathers from a fish as make a living in Crowland; and the people are so stupid, as the saying goes, 'they'd drown a fish in water.'" Manifestly he was not in love with the place. He did not even think much of the old abbey: "It's very ruinous," was his expression thereof.

Crowland is a thoroughly old-world village; I know no other that so well deserves the epithet: its gray-toned cottages, grouped round the decayed and time-rent fane, save the ruins from utter desolation. Crowland impressed us as a spot that exists simply because it has existed: like the abbey, it looks so old that one can hardly imagine it was ever new. It is—

> A world-forgotten village,
> Like a soul that steps aside
> Into some quiet haven
> From the full rush of tide.
> A place where poets still may dream,
> Where the wheels of Life swing slow;
> And over all there hangs the peace
> Of centuries ago.

Crowland village, apart from its ruined abbey, is quaint rather than beautiful; it appeals to the lover of the past perhaps more than to the lover of the picturesque. We found there a primitive and clean little inn where we stabled our horses and procured for ourselves a simple, but sufficient, repast that was served in a tiny parlour. Whilst waiting for our meal to be prepared, having no guide-book, we consulted our *Paterson's Roads* to see if it gave any particulars of the place, and this is what we discovered: "Crowland, a place of very remote antiquity, particularly interesting to the antiquary on account of the ruins of its once extensive and splendid abbey, and its singular triangular-shaped bridge, is now reduced to the size of a large village that possesses little more than the ruins of its former

splendour. The chief existing remains of the abbey are the skeleton of the nave of the conventual church, with parts of the south and north aisles; the latter of which is covered over, pewed, and fitted up as a parish church. The triangular bridge in the middle of the town may be looked upon as one of the greatest curiosities in Britain, if not in Europe; it is of stone, and consists of three pointed arches springing from as many abutments that unite their groins in the centre. . . . Crowland being so surrounded by fens is inaccessible, except from the north and east, in which directions the road is formed by artificial banks of earth, and from this singular situation it has been, not inaptly, compared to Venice." I have again quoted from this old and famous road-book, which was as familiar to our forefathers as "Bradshaw" is to us, because it shows the sort of combination of road-book and guide that the pre-railway traveller was provided with, all England and Wales being included in one thick volume. Paterson's accounts of famous spots and places of interest are not perhaps so learned or long as those of the modern hand-book, but they are possibly sufficient, and brevity is an advantage to the tourist who desires to arrive quickly at his information.

In olden days it would seem that the spot whereon Crowland now stands was one of the many Fen islands, consisting of comparatively dry and firm soil that rose above the general level of the moist lowlands, or, to be more exact, a wilderness of shallow waters—a district described by Smiles as

"an inland sea in winter, and a noxious swamp in summer"; but so slight is the rise of the land that to the superficial observer it scarcely seems to rise at all. Here—on this "Isle of Crowland"—as it was formerly called in company with other similar islands, such as the better-known "Isle of Ely"—the old monks built their abbey, remote and fen-girt from the outer world, only to be approached at first by boats, and, in long years after also, by a solitary raised causeway frequently under water and nearly always unsafe and untravellable in winter. The problem to me is how ever all the stone required for the building was secured. Presumably most of it was brought down the Welland from Stamford; but what a long and laborious task the carrying of it must have been. Still, the problem sinks into insignificance like that of Stonehenge, for all authorities on this mysterious monument of antiquity agree that the nearest spot to Salisbury Plain from which the igneous rocks that compose the inner circle could come, would be either Cornwall or North Wales! An effective word-picture of the early monastery is given in Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake* which I take the liberty to quote, though he describes the building as being chiefly of timber, but the first historic record declares that it was "firmly built of stone." Thus, then, Kingsley writes: "And they rowed away for Crowland . . . and they glided on until they came to the sacred isle, the most holy sanctuary of St. Guthlac and his monks. . . . At last they came to Crowland minster, a vast range of high-peaked buildings founded on

piles of oak and alder driven into the fen, itself built almost entirely of timber from the Bruneswold; barns, granaries, stables, workshops, strangers' hall, fit for the boundless hospitality of Crowland; infirmary, refectory, dormitory, library, abbot's lodgings, cloisters; with the great minster towering up, a steep pile, half wood, half stone, with narrow round-headed windows, and leaden roofs; and above all the great wooden tower, from which on high-days chimed out the melody of the seven famous bells, which had not their like in English land." So minute is the detailed description of that which was such a long time off that one is almost tempted to wonder how Kingsley knew all this.

Leaving our little inn we first inspected the exceedingly quaint triangular bridge that stands in the main thoroughfare—a thoroughfare without any traffic it appeared to us, nor did we see where any future traffic was to come from. This structure is stated to be positively unique. Apart from its uncommon form, it certainly has a curious appearance to-day, as the roadway below is dry, and the "three-way bridge," as it is locally called, has much the meaningless look that a ship would have stranded far inland. This quaint structure consists of three high-pitched half arches, at equal distances from each other, that meet at the top. The way over the bridge is both narrow and steep, so that manifestly it could only have been intended for pedestrians.

Much good ink has been spilt by antiquaries and archæologists anent the peculiar form of the bridge, and different theories have been put forward to

solve this enigma in building: some authorities having declared their belief that it was a mere freak of the monks indulged in from pure eccentricity; others reason that it was intended to support a high cross, but surely a bridge would hardly have been built as a foundation for this? And it is so manifestly a bridge complete in itself, though novel in design, nor does there appear to me to be room for the base of an important cross on the apex of the arches where alone it could come. It is verily an archæological *pons asinorum*. Personally I find a difficulty in subscribing to either the freak or the cross theory; indeed, a more reasonable solution of the puzzle presents itself to me as one who does not look for out-of-the-way causes. It seems possible, rather should I say highly probable, that when the bridge was built, in the days before the drainage of the Fens, a stream may have flowed past here, and it may have been joined by another Y fashion. To cross these streams where they both met to the three points of dry ground would entail a triangular bridge, and the monks were equal to the occasion! The only fault I can find with this theory is that it is so simple! Shortly after writing this, in looking over an old portfolio of pictures, I chanced upon a rather crude, but fairly faithful, engraving of this very bridge. The work was not dated, but I judged it to be of the late seventeenth or of the early eighteenth century, a pure guess on my part. However, it is interesting to note that this ancient engraving showed two streams flowing under the bridge precisely as suggested. I merely mention

the fact, though it proves really nothing, for the engraver or artist may easily have added the water, imagining that it ought to be there. Here again the advantage of photography is apparent, for the lens has no bias, and if it seldom lends itself to the picturesque, at least it does not invent accessories.

On the parapet at the foot of the bridge is a mutilated and weather-worn statue, having apparently a crown on its head and a globe in its hand. An absurd local tradition declares this to be intended for Cromwell holding a ball. Why it should be fathered on to the Protector is beyond my understanding; it is more than probable that it existed centuries before he was born. Looking sideways at the figure it is noticeably thin, and was manifestly only intended to be seen from the front. One may therefore, I think, reasonably conclude that it originally came from a niche in the abbey, for it is quite out of place on the bridge, and could never have properly belonged to it. Most probably, judging from similar old sculptures, it was intended for our Lord, and had place in the centre of the pediment over the west front of the abbey, a portion of the building that has now disappeared. Some antiquaries, however, maintain that it is intended for King Ethelbald, the founder of the monastery; this would be a plausible enough suggestion but for the fact that this king is already represented amongst the statues that still adorn the abbey.

The mouldings, ribs, and vaultings of the arches indicate the date of the present bridge to be about the middle of the fourteenth century. It is worthy of

note how readily an archæologist may determine the approximate date of an ancient building by its style, even, if needs be, by a small portion of its carvings; but what will the archæologists of centuries hence be able to make of our present jumble of all periods? a mixture of past forms from which the meaning and true spirit have fled. Indeed, a certain famous English architect once boasted, I have been told, that he made such an excellent copy of an Early English building, even to the working of the stones roughly, in reverent imitation of the original, that he gave it as his opinion that, in the course of a century or two, when the new building had become duly time-toned, weather-stained, and the stone-work crumbled a little here and there, no future antiquary would be able to distinguish it from a genuine Early English structure, unless possibly by its better state of preservation. Alas! the nineteenth century has no specially distinguishing style, save that of huge hotels and railway stations! Our most successful ecclesiastical edifices are but copies of various medieval examples. We can copy better than we can create! A new architectural style worthy of the century has yet to be invented, and it appears as though—in spite of much striving after—the century will pass away without such an achievement.

Then we made our way to the ruined abbey in the reverent spirit of an ancient pilgrim, although in the further spirit of this luxurious century our pilgrimage was performed with ease on wheels, and not laboriously on foot. The most picturesque and interesting part of this fane of ancient devotion is

the beautiful west front, glorious even in ruin, with its elaborate decorations, its many statues standing, as erst, each in its niche, its great window, now a mighty void, shaftless and jambless, and its graceful pointed Gothic doorway below. An illustration of this portion of the abbey is given with this chapter. The other portions of the building are of much archæological interest, but not so statelily picturesque, nor can any drawing in black and white suggest the wonderful wealth of weather-tinting that the time-worn masonry has assumed. The summer suns and winter storms of unremembered years have left their magic traces upon the wonderful west front of this age-hallowed shrine, tinging it with softest colouring varying with every inch of surface!

Within the ancient nave now open to the sky, where grows the lank, rank grass under foot in place of the smooth inlaid pavement often trod by sleek abbot, and meek or merry monk, we observed the base of a Perpendicular pillar round which the earth had been excavated, apparently to show the foundation, and we noticed that this was composed of various old carved stones of an earlier period of architecture, presumably when the abbey was undergoing a medieval restoration or rebuilding; plainly proving, as is well known, that the builders of the past did not hold their predecessors' works so very sacred, and to a certain extent the modern restorer would be justified in quoting this fact in extenuation of his doings, or misdoings, "What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander" surely? Only those medieval restorers sinned so magnificently, and the

modern restorer, as a rule, sins so miserably! From the medieval reconstructor to the restorer of the Churchwarden era is a vast gulf. It would be an archæological curiosity and an object lesson in ecclesiastical construction if we could have preserved for our study and edification a church showing all the varying periods of architecture, from the crude Saxon and stern Norman to that of to-day!

Reluctantly we left Crowland's old ruined abbey that stands alone in crumbling, dusky majesty, as though solemnly musing over the chances and changes of its chequered life's long history. This remote and hoary pile, surrounded by the wild waste of watery fens, impressed us with an undefinable feeling of mystery and melancholy—a mystery that had to do with the past, and a melancholy that had to do with the present. No other ruin has impressed us quite in the same way, but then Crowland Abbey has a striking individuality seen from near or afar; it is utterly unlike any other spot, and from every point of view forms a most effective picture. Time has fraught its ancient walls with meaning, and the rare dower of antiquity, the bloom of centuries is gathered over them all—a bloom that has beautified what man and age have left of the former hallowed sanctuary. Now a solemn peacefulness broods incumbent over Crowland's solitary tower, broken arches, and decaying masonry. No more, as in the days of old, at evensong when the silent stars come out, does the belated fisherman stop his skiff awhile by the side of the inland isle, to listen to the sweet chanting of the monks, mingling with the organ's

CROWLAND ABBEY.

solemn thunder-tones. The poetry and the romance of the ancient faith and days have departed, and the prosaic present strikes a purely pathetic key—of things that have been and are no more! The ancient abbey

> in ruin stands lone in the solitude;
> The wild birds sing above it, and the ivy clings around,
> And under its poppies its old-time worshippers sleep sound:
> Relic of days forgotten, dead form of an *ancient* faith,
> Haunting the light of the present, a vanished Past's dim wraith!
> . . . . . .
> And the winds wail up from the seaward, and sigh in the long grave grass
> A message of weltering tides, and of things that were and must pass.

Reluctantly, as I have said, we left this lonely Fenland fane, a legend in stone: a dream of Gothic glory in its prime, and a thing of beauty in decay; and beauty is a more precious possession than glory! Very beautiful did the ancient ruin look as we took our farewell glance at it, with the warm sun's rays touching tenderly its gray-toned walls and lightening up their century-gathered gloom, whilst the solemn shadows of pillared recesses and deep-set arches lent a mystic glamour to the pile, as though it held some hidden secrets of the past there, not to be revealed to modern mortals, all of which aroused our strongest sympathies, or a feeling close akin thereto — for I know not for certain whether mere inert matter can really arouse human sympathy, though I think it can.

This wild and wide Fenland was anciently renowned for its many and wealthy monasteries.

A medieval rhyme has been preserved to us that relates the traditional reputations these religious establishments respectively had. Of this rhyme there are two versions, one is as follows :—

Ramsey, the bounteous of gold and of fee ;
Crowland, as courteous as courteous may be ;
Spalding the rich, and Peterborough the proud ;
Sawtrey, by the way, that poore abbaye,
Gave more alms in one day
Than all they.

The other version runs more fully thus :—

Ramsey, the rich of gold and of fee,
Thorney, the flower of many a fair tree,
Crowland, the courteous of their meat and drink,
Spalding, the gluttons, as all people do think,
Peterborough, the proud, as all men do say :
Sawtrey, by the way, that old abbey,
Gave more alms in one day than all they.

From Crowland we decided to drive some nine and a half miles on to Spalding, where we proposed to spend the night; or rather the map decided the matter, for our choice of roads out of Crowland, unless we went south, was limited to this one; it was a pure case of "Hobson's choice," to Spalding we must go, and thither we went. Mounting the dog-cart once more we were soon in the open country; our road, like that of the morning, was level and winding, with the far-reaching fens all around, that stretched away through greens, yellows, russets, and grays to a hazy horizon of blue. A short distance on our way by the roadside we observed a large notice-board, that claimed our

attention from its size, so we pulled up the better to examine it, and found this legend plainly painted thereon :—

1000 Miles
in
1000 Hours,
by Henry Girdlestone,
at the age of 56,
in the year 1844.

As, nowadays, people mostly travel by rail, this record of a past performance is wasting its information in the wilderness for want of readers, so I have been tempted to repeat the account of Mr. Henry Girdlestone's feat here.

Our road was an uneventful one ; the scenery it provided was somewhat monotonous, but there was a certain inexplicable fascination about its monotony as there is in that of the sea. It had the peculiar quality of being monotonous without being wearisome. As in our drive to Crowland, what especially struck us in our drive therefrom was the sense of silence, space, and solitude. Spread out around us were leagues upon leagues of level land, like a petrified sea, that melted away imperceptibly into a palpitating blueness in which all things became blended, indistinct, or wholly lost. Leagues of grass lands and marshes, splashed here and there with vivid colour, and enlivened ever and again by the silvery gleam of still, or the sunlit sparkle of wind-stirred water ; its flatness accentuated, now and again, by a solitary uprising poplar, or a lonely, lofty windmill — built high to catch every wind — and

these served to emphasise the general solitude: the prevailing silence was made the more striking by the infrequent peevish cry of some stray bird that seemed strangely loud upon the quiet air.

The scenery could not be called picturesque, yet it possessed the rarer quality of quaintness, and it therefore interested us. In a manner it was beautiful on account of its colour, and the sky-scape overhead was grand because so wide, whilst it flooded the vast breadth of unshaded land with a wealth of light. After all, let mountain lovers say what they will, a flat land has its charms; it may not be "sweetly pretty," but it is blessed with an abundance of light, and light begets cheerfulness; and its cloud-scapes, sunrises, and sunsets, that compel you to notice them, are a revelation in themselves. A Dutch artist once told me, when I was pointing out to him what I considered the paintable qualities of the South Downs, that he honestly considered hills and mountains a fraud, as they hid so much of the sky, which, to him, appeared infinitely more beautiful and changeful both in form and colour. "There is a fashion in scenery," said he; "mountain lands have been fortunate in their poets and writers; some day a poet or great writer may arise who will sing or describe for us the little-heeded beauties of the lowlands, and the hills will go out of fashion. The public simply admire what they are told to admire." If Ruskin had only been born in the lowlands of Lincolnshire, then might we have had some chapters in his works enlarging upon their peculiar beauties! Truly Tennyson was

born in Lincolnshire, but he was born in the Wolds surrounded by woods and hills. Even so, Tennyson has not done for the Wolds what Scott has done for the Scotch Highlands ; the scenery of the Wolds has its special charms, but it is no tourist-haunted land, yet none the less beautiful on that account, and selfishly I am thankful that there are such spacious beauty spots still left to us in England unknown to, and unregarded by, the cheap-tripper. Let us hope that no popular guide-book will be written about certain districts to needlessly call his attention to them.

This corner of England that we were traversing has an unfamiliar aspect to the average Englishman ; the buildings and people therein truly are English, intensely English, but, these apart, the country looks strange and foreign. It is a novel experience to drive for miles along an embanked road looking down upon all the landscape, just as it is equally curious, on the other hand, to drive along a road below an embanked river! Keen and fresh came the breezes to us from over the mighty fens, for they were unrestrained even by a hedge ; pleasantly refreshing and scented were they with the cool odours of marsh flowers, plants, and reeds. The fields being divided by dykes and ditches, in place of hedges, the landscape gained in breadth, for the sweep of the eye was not continually arrested by the bounding hedges that but too often cut up the prospect of the English country-side, chess-board fashion.

At one spot low down to the right of our way

was a swampy bit of ground, half land, half water, if anything more water than land; here tall reeds were bending and tossing about before the wild wind, and the pools of water were stirred by mimic waves, and in the heart of all this was a notice-board inscribed "Trespassers will be prosecuted"! Somehow this simple and familiar warning in such a position brought to mind the comic side of life and aroused much merriment, for who in the wide world would wish to trespass there? We were in such good humour with ourselves and all things that we were easily amused: our superabundance of health begot a mirthful spirit readily provoked and difficult to damp. I verily believe that when trifles went wrong on the journey, which by the way they very seldom did, then we were the merriest, as though to show that nothing could depress us. I remember on a former tour that we got caught in a heavy storm of rain when crossing an open moor; the storm came up suddenly from behind and took us quite by surprise, so that we got pretty well wet before we could get our mackintoshes out; shelter was there none, and the result was that, after a couple of hours' driving along an exposed road, we arrived at a little country inn positively drenched through to the skin, the water running off the dogcart in streams, and all things damp and dripping, yet in spite of our sorry plight we felt "as jolly as a sandboy," and could not restrain our laughter at the dismal picture we presented as we drove into the stable-yard; indeed, we treated the matter as a huge joke, and I thought to myself, "Now if only Charles

Keene were here to sketch us arriving thus, what an excellent subject we should make for a *Punch* picture with the legend below 'The pleasures of a driving tour!'" So excellent did the joke appear to us that we had changed our saturated clothing and put on dry things, and had warmed ourselves before a roaring wood fire which the kind-hearted landlady had lighted for us, and had further refreshed ourselves with the best the house could provide, before our merry spirits quieted down. So it took some time to quiet them down!

Now this digression has taken us to the village of Cowbit, a dreary, forsaken-looking place, desolate enough, one would imagine, to disgust even a recluse. Here we noticed the dilapidated church tower was leaning very much on one side, owing doubtless to the uncertain foundation afforded by the marshy soil; indeed, it leaned over to such an extent as to suggest toppling down altogether before long, so much so that it gave us the unpleasant feeling that it might untowardly collapse when we were there. It may be that the tower will stand thus for years; all the same, did I worship in that fane I feel sure I should ever be thinking rather about the stability of the fabric than of the prayers or of the sermon!

Leaving this forsaken spot — where we saw neither man, woman, nor child, not even a stray dog or odd chicken about to lessen its forlorn look—a short way ahead we discovered that our way was blocked by a broken-down traction engine, a hideous black iron monster of large proportions,

that stood helplessly right in the very centre of the road, so that it was extremely doubtful if there were sufficient room left for us to pass by; and if we failed to do this and our wheels went over the edge of the embankment we were on, which was fenceless on both sides, the dog-cart and horses might very probably follow suit. Some men were busily hammering and tinkering at the engine; they said that she had broken down an hour ago, and they had not been able to get her to move since, but fortunately there had been no traffic coming along, and we were the first party to arrive on the scene. All of which was very entertaining and informative, but not very helpful as to how we were to proceed. Did they think we could possibly get by? Well, they did not know, they hardly thought so; but they would measure the width of our carriage and the width of the roadway left. This being duly done, it was discovered that there was just room, but not even the proverbial inch to spare. Thereupon we naturally concluded that the margin for safety was insufficient! Here was a pleasant predicament to be in! We could not well go back; on the other hand the men confessed that they had no idea when they would be able "to get the thing to work again." The steam was up, but when turned on the iron monster snorted, creaked, and groaned, but resolutely refused to budge. "Something has given way, and we be trying to mend it" was the only consolation offered us, beyond the fact that they had sent a man over to Spalding for help, but when he would return they

did not know; "It were certainly bad luck that we should have been right in the middle of the road when she gave out, but you see we never expected anything of the kind." It was an unfortunate position of affairs; if we decided to attempt to drive by, and our horses shied or swerved ever so little in the attempt, a serious accident was almost a certainty; so, after considering the matter well, a happy, if troublesome, way out of the difficulty occurred to us: this was to unharness both horses and lead them past the obstructing engine, then to wheel the dog-cart after as best we could. Just as we had decided to do this, the monster gave another spasmodic snort or two and began to move in a jerky fashion, only to break down again, then the men set to work once more a-hammering. How long would this go on? we wondered. However, the few yards that the engine had managed to move was to one side, which gave us a little more room to pass, whereupon, acting under a sudden impulse, we whipped the horses up, and taking tight hold of the reins dashed safely by, but it was "a touch and go" affair; our horses did swerve a trifle, and we just missed bringing our tour to a conclusion on the spot, but "all's well that ends well," and "a miss is as good as a mile!"

After this little episode we had a peaceful progress on to Spalding undisturbed by further adventure. The approach to this essentially old-world-looking town from the Crowland direction alongside the river Welland—which is here embanked and made to run straight, canal fashion, and has shady

trees and grassy margins on either side—is exceedingly Dutch-like and very pleasant. Few English towns have so attractive an approach; it gave us a favourable impression of the place at once—so imperceptibly the country road became the town street, first the trees, then the houses. Spalding is a place that seems more of a natural growth, an integral part of the scenery, so in harmony is it therewith, rather than a conglomeration of houses built merely for man's convenience. Such charmingly old-fashioned, prosperous, but delightfully unprogressive towns are not to be met with every day, when the ambition of most places appears to be more or less a second-hand copy of London; and at a sacrifice of all individuality they strive after this undesirable ideal. How refreshing is a little originality in this world, that grows more sadly commonplace and colourless year by year! Alas! we live in an age of civilised uniformity, an age that has given us railways and ironclads in far-off Japan, and tramway lines and French *tables d'hôte* in the very heart of ancient Egypt! Soon the only ground the unconventional traveller will have left to him will be the more remote spots of rural England! It is far more primitive and picturesque to-day than rural new America with its up-to-date villages lighted with electricity, and stores provided with all the latest novelties of Chicago or New York! Where will the next-century mortal find the rest and repose of the past?

Driving into Spalding we noticed the ancient hostelry of the "White Hart" facing the market

square, a hostelry that was ancient when the railways still were young, and on the lamp that projected over the centre of this old house we further noticed the quaint legend "Harper ye Host," a conceit that pleased us much. "A host must surely be one of the right sort thus to proclaim himself," we reasoned, "we will place ourselves under his care"; so without more ado we drove beneath the archway into the courtyard, and confidently handed our horses over to the ready ostler's charge, and sought for ourselves entertainment and shelter beneath the sign of the "White Hart."

CHAPTER X

Spalding—"Ye Olde White Horse Inne"—An ancient hall and quaint garden—Epitaph-hunting—A signboard joke—Across the Fens—A strange world—Storm and sunshine—An awkward predicament—Brown—Birthplace of Hereward the Wake—A medieval railway station!—Tombstone verses.

We determined that we would devote the next morning to leisurely exploring Spalding, armed with sketch-book and camera, for the ancient town promised, from the glance we had of it whilst driving in, to provide plenty of picturesque and quaint material for both pencil and lens.

We had not to search long for a subject, for in less than five minutes we came upon a tempting architectural bit in the shape of a past-time inn, with a thatched roof, high gables, and dormer windows, whose swinging signboard proclaimed it to be "Ye Olde White Horse Inne." It was a building full of a certain quiet character that was very pleasing—a home-like and unpretentious structure whose picturesqueness was the outcome of necessity, and all the more charming for its unconsciousness.

Then wandering by the waterside we chanced upon a beautiful and ancient house called Ayscough Hall, gray-gabled, time-toned, and weather-worn, with a great tranquil garden of the old-fashioned sort

in the rear, rejoicing in the possession of massive yew hedges, clipped and terraced in the formally decorative manner that so delighted the hearts and eyes of our ancestors, who loved to walk and talk and flirt between walls of living green. In olden days the architect often planned the garden as well as the house; so, as at Haddon Hall, Montacute, and elsewhere, we frequently find the stone terrace forming an architectural feature in the grounds, and immediately beyond this Nature trimmed, tamed, and domesticated with prim walks and trees fantastically cut into strange shapes. And what delightful retreats and pleasant pictures these old formal gardens make: perhaps it would be well if nowadays the architect of the house were employed to design the grounds that it will stand in; but alas! this is not a home-building age, so only rarely is the idea feasible—for does not the modern man generally buy his "desirable residence" ready-made as he does his furniture, fitting into it as best he may?

Upon inquiry we learnt that this charming old-world hall with its dreamy garden, so eloquent of the past, had been purchased by the town for a public park. Fortunate people of Spalding! And what a unique and enjoyable little park it will make if it is only left alone and preserved as it is; but if for a passing fad or fashion the landscape gardener is ever let loose thereon, what havoc may be wrought under the cuckoo-cry of improvement! Such old gardens are the growth of centuries; money will not create them in less time, yet, sad to realise, they may be destroyed in a few weeks or days! What

the modern restorer is to an ancient and beautiful church, so is the modern landscape gardener to the quaintly formal old English garden.

The house itself appeared to be deserted and shut up, so that unfortunately we were unable to obtain a glance at its interior. Some portions of the building looked very old, possibly as early as the fifteenth century, especially a large stone-mullioned window, filled—we judged from the exterior view—with some interesting specimens of ancient heraldic glass, but the other portions were of later date, and signs of nineteenth-century modernising were not wanting. We asked a man we saw if he knew how old the oldest part of the hall was, and he honestly replied that he did not; "but it be a goodish bit older nor I. You sees they don't register the birth of buildings as they does babies, so it's difficult to find out how old they be." Then the man chuckled to himself, "You sees I'se a bit of a wit in my way," but it was just what we did not see; nevertheless we put on a conventional smile just to please him, whereupon, in a confidential whisper, he informed us where we could get "as good a glass of ale as is to be had in all Lincolnshire, if not better, and I don't mind a-showing you the way there and drinking your very good health." It is rather damping to think how many of our conversations with rural folk have come to a similar ending. "Why," we rejoined in feigned surprise, "you look like a teetotaler; you surely would not be seen drinking beer in a public-house." The air of mute astonishment that pervaded his features was a study. "Well, I'm blest!"

he exclaimed, more in a tone of sorrow than of anger, "I've never been taken for that before"—and thereupon he turned round and walked hastily away with as much dignity as he could assume. Could it be that we had hurt his feelings by our unfounded imputation, or could he possibly think that we had made such a base insinuation for the mean purpose of saving our twopence? However, we did not feel inclined to call after him, so the incident closed. One does meet with curious characters on the road—a remark I believe that I have made before. Then we again turned our diverted attention to the old house, which pleased us from the indefinable look it had of having seen an eventful and historic past: one generation had done this, another had done that, one had added, another had pulled down; so at least we read the story in stone.

Next we found our way by accident, not of set purpose, to the spacious parish church, a much altered and enlarged edifice, unless our judgment by appearances was at fault—a cathedral in miniature. Somehow, though manifestly of considerable archæological interest, the fabric did not appeal to us, but this may have been owing to our mood that day. The interior is vast—but we do not worship mere vastness—and has the peculiarity of possessing four aisles; two, instead of the usual one, on each side. An enthusiastic antiquary, whom I afterwards met, declared to me that Spalding church was one of the finest and most interesting in the county, and jokingly remarked in a good-natured way that my not finding it so proved that I was uninteresting.

Well, I accept the reproach, and cling to my own opinion! It is strange how one sometimes takes a sudden dislike to a place or building as well as to a person, for no reason that we can possibly assign to ourselves; and for my own part, favourable or unfavourable, my first impression lasts. It is a clear case of—

> I do not like thee, Dr. Fell—
> The reason why I cannot tell:
> But this I know, and know full well,
> I do not like thee, Dr. Fell.

Not being interested in the church, we wandered about the large and grass-grown graveyard, and amidst the moss-encrusted and lichen-laden tombstones, in search of any quaint epitaph that Time and man might have spared, for I regret to say that the despoiling hand of religious prudery is answerable for the deliberate destruction of sundry quaint epitaphs. A flagrant case of this came under my notice on a previous journey, when I learnt that the two concluding lines of a tombstone inscription had been purposely erased as being profane. By fortunate chance I was enabled, through a clergyman who had retained a copy of the sinning lines, to rescue them from oblivion; though, to be perfectly honest, I have to confess that the words of the obliterated lines were given to me for the purpose of justifying their removal! However, looking upon such things, as I ever endeavour to do, in the spirit of the age that dictated them, the condemned lines appeared innocent enough to me; but then, as a certain high church ecclesiastic once told me, in his

opinion, when curious old epitaphs were concerned, my charity was "too wide, and covered too many sins." Whether my charity be too wide or not is a matter I do not care to discuss, but my readers may judge for themselves, if they be so minded and care to take the trouble to refer to a former work of mine, *Across England in a Dog-cart*, page 386.

Our search in the churchyard at Spalding for any curious epitaphs was unrewarded by any "finds"; we discovered nothing but dreary commonplaces. Graveyard literature is becoming — has become, rather should I say — very proper, very same, yet very sad. Somehow those quaint old-time inscriptions appeal to me; when I read them I seem to understand what manner of man lies sleeping below; they bring the dead to life again, and rescue forgotten traits from total oblivion. It seems to us now strange that our ancestors should have treated death in this lighter strain, though perhaps not stranger than some of the coarse jokes in carvings that the presumably devout monkish medieval sculptor introduced into the churches of the period. Each age sees things from its own standpoint, and I am inclined to think that we take both life and death more seriously than our ancestors :—

Each century somewhat new
  Is felt and thought of death—the problem strange
  With newer knowledge seems to change,
It changes, as we change our point of view.
And in this age when over much is known,
  When Science summons from the deep
  Dim past the centuries that sleep,
When Thought is crowned for ruler, Thought alone,
  We gaze at Death with saddest eyes.

Soon, especially if man is to be allowed to help Time in the work of obliteration, quaint and interesting epitaphs will only be discoverable in books; perhaps better this than to be lost altogether, but I do not like my epitaphs served thus; I prefer to trace them for myself direct from the ancient tombstones, even though it entails a journey, time, and trouble to do this, for then I know they are genuine. I have an uneasy suspicion that the majority of clever and amusing epitaphs we find in books never came from tombstones at all, but owe their existence solely to the inventive faculties of various writers; I hope I am wrong, but my hoping does not prove me so! As an example of what I mean, I was reading a work the other day by a learned antiquary, in which I found quoted quite seriously the following droll epitaph—

> Underneath this ancient pew
> Lieth the body of Jonathan Blue,
> His name was Black, but that wouldn't do,

with the information that it existed in a church in Berkshire. Now this really will not do, it is far too indefinite; I object to be sent epitaph-hunting all over a whole county; it would surely be as easy to give the name of the church as to state that it was somewhere "in Berkshire," which is suggestive of its being nowhere! Even when you know the precise locality of the church wherein is a quaint epitaph, it is not always easy to find the latter, as on one occasion I actually learnt from the clerk that an inscription that I had come a long way specially to

see for myself and to copy, had been covered over and hidden by a brand new organ! Matting you may move, even a harmonium, and I always do on principle, as I once made an interesting discovery by so doing; but an organ is a very different matter; not that I should have any scruples under the circumstances in moving an organ, if I could!

From the church we strolled down the river-side, or as near to it as we could, in search of sketchable bits — and shipping, for though some ten miles inland (judging by our map), Spalding is a seaport, small, but flourishing in its way; brigs and sloops, inconsiderable in size according to modern commercial ideas, find their way thither, and these are more profitable to the artist, if not to their owners, than huge steamers and big iron vessels. Small sea-craft are always picturesque, which is more than can be said of their larger brethren. On our way we passed a public-house, its projecting sign had two men's heads painted thereon, with the title above, "The Loggerheads," and below the legend, "We be Loggerheads three," a joke at the expense of the reader. It would be interesting to learn the origin of this curious and uncommon sign. I have consulted all the likely books in my library, but, though I find allusions to it, I can discover no explanation thereof.

It was late in the afternoon before we made a start from Spalding; exploring, sketching, and photographing, to say nothing of epitaph-hunting or chatting with local folk, take up time, so our morning slipped quietly away before we knew it,

though we had made an early beginning. As the time remaining was short, after a glance at our map, we determined to drive on to Bourn, a twelve-mile stage, and to remain there the night.

Since mid-day the sky had clouded over, whilst the barometer had dropped considerably; the weather looked gray and gloomy, and the wind blew gustily from the west. "You'll have a storm," prophesied the ostler, "and it's a wild, exposed road on to Bourn, right across the marshes, and there's no shelter on the way." We smilingly thanked the ostler for his information and his solicitude for our welfare, but all the same proceeded on our stage, jokingly reminding him that we were composed of "neither sugar nor salt." So with this encouraging "set-off" we parted, and soon found ourselves once more in the wide Fenland, with which our road was on a level, neither above nor below, as generally prevails in the district. Passing by a gray, stone-built, and picturesque old home, some short distance off in the flat fields, and leaving behind the last traces of Spalding in the shape of roadside villas and prim cottages, we entered upon a lonesome stretch of country, dark and dank and dreary, yet fascinating because so dreary, so foreign-looking, and so eerie!

Overhead, without a break, stretched the louring, dun-coloured sky; the low-lying landscape around, as though in sympathy therewith, was all of dull greens and grays, varied by long wide dykes and sedgy pools of a dismal leaden hue. The wild wind blew chilly and fitfully, and made a melancholy sighing sort of sound as it swept over the rank

A FENLAND HOME.

reeds and coarse grasses, whilst it bent into a great curve the solitary tall poplar that alone stood out in relief against the stormy sky—

> For leagues no other tree did mark
> The level waste, the rounding gray.

There was plenty of movement everywhere, for the strong breeze made waves of the long lank grass, as it makes waves of the sea; but there were no signs of life except for a few stray storm-loving seagulls that, for reasons best known to themselves, were whirling about thus far inland, uttering peevish cries the while, apparently as much out of their element as a sailor of the old school ashore.

A strange, weird world this English Fenland seems to unfamiliar eyes, especially when seen under a brooding sky; and there is a peculiar quality of mystery, that baffles description and cannot be analysed, in the deep blue-gray palpitating gloom that gathers over the Fenland distances when they lie under the threatening shadow of some coming storm. Under such conditions the scenery of the Fens is pronouncedly striking, but even under ordinary circumstances a man can have but little poetry in his soul who cannot admire its wild beauties, its vast breadths of luxuriant greenery over which the eye can range unrestrained for leagues upon leagues on every side, its space-expressing distances and its mighty cloud-scapes, for the sky-scape is a feature in the Fenland prospect not to be overlooked; in fact, I am inclined to think that its sky scenery—if I may be allowed the term

—is the finest and most wonderful in the world. It is worth a long journey to the district if only to behold one of its gorgeous sunsets, when you look upon a moist atmosphere saturated with colour so that it becomes opalescent, and the sinking sun seen through the vibrating air is magnified to twice its real size as it sets in a world of melting rubies and molten gold: from the western slopes of far-off California I have looked down upon the sun dipping into the wide Pacific amidst a riot of colour, but nothing like this! It is not always necessary to leave England in search of the strange and beautiful; the more I travel abroad, the more I am convinced of this!

It almost seemed to us, as we drove along, that somehow we must be travelling in a foreign land, so un-English and unfamiliar did the prospect appear! I have long studied the scenery of Mars through the telescope, have in the silent hours of the night wandered thus over the mighty, water-intersected plains of that distant planet, and had only the vegetation of the Fens been red instead of green, we might in imagination well have fancied ourselves touring in Mars! Truly this may be considered a rather too far-fetched phantasy, but as Bernard Barton, the East Anglian poet, says—

> There is a pleasure now and then, in giving
> Full scope to Fancy and Imagination.

Then suddenly, so suddenly as to be almost startling, one of those scenic revelations and surprises that this singular land abounds in, took place. Low down

there came a long rift in the cheerless, gray, vapoury canopy above, followed by a suspicion of warm light, after which slowly the round red sun peeped forth embroidering the edges of the clouds around him with fringes of fire, and sending forth throbbing trails of burning orange everywhere over the sky; then the landscape below became reflective and receptive, and was changed from grave to gay as though by magic, the dull, leaden-hued waters of the stagnant dykes and dreary pools became liquid gold all glowing with light and brightness, and the damp, dismal swamp grasses were transformed into waving masses of translucent yellow-green; the distance became a wonderfully pure transparent blue, and colour, tender, rich, or glowing, was rampant everywhere: yet five minutes had wrought this marvellous change from depressing gloominess to cheerful gaiety! The English climate has its faults as well as its virtues, but it cannot fairly be charged with monotony, nor does it ever fail to interest the quiet observer. As we live in a land of such fine and changeful sky-scapes, I wonder we do not study them a little more; they are often as worthy of note as the scenery. Where would be the beauty of most of Turner's or Constable's landscapes without their skies? A well-known artist told me that a good sky was the making of a picture, and that, as a matter of fact, he gave more time and study to it than to any other part of his work. "I never miss," said he, "when out of doors making a sketch of a fine cloud effect, and I have found these studies of the utmost value; you cannot invent clouds success-

fully, whatever else you may do." One day when I was looking at a half-finished picture of his, and wondering why it had remained so long in that condition, he exclaimed, in response to my inquiring glance, "Oh! I'm waiting for a suitable sky!"

The last four or five miles of our road into Bourn was a perfectly straight stretch, its parallel lines lessening as they receded till lost in a point on the horizon—a grand object lesson in perspective! A road level and direct enough to delight the heart of a railway engineer, with everything plainly revealed for miles ahead and no pleasant surprises therefore possible. I am afraid I am a little fastidious in the matter of roads; I like a winding one, and within reasonable limits the more it winds the better I like it, so that at every fresh bend before me, I am kept in a state of delightful expectancy as to what new and probably wholly unexpected beauty will be presented to my eyes: thus I am enticed on and on from early morning till the evening, never disappointed and never satiated.

On either side of our present road ran a wide dyke as usual by way of fence, crossed by frequent bridges giving access to fields, footpaths, and narrow by-roads. It appeared to us a very simple and easy matter for a careless whip on a dark night to drive right into this dyke, which, judging from the dark look of its water, was fairly deep; you need a sober coachman for these open Fenland roads! Even a cyclist would be wise to proceed with caution along them after sundown, or a sudden bath in dirty water might be the result. Indeed, as

we drove on we observed that a poor cow had somehow managed to slip down the steep bank into the dyke, and there she was swimming up and down it apparently on the outlook for an easy spot to climb out, but her struggles to gain a footing on the slippery earth were alas! in vain ; three men followed the unfortunate animal up and down, and at every attempt she made to reach *terra firma* they commenced prodding her behind with long sticks and shouting violently, by way of encouragement, we presumed ; but prods and shouts were unavailing, the final result always being that the cow slipped quietly down into the dyke again and recommenced her swimming. Had we not felt sorry for the poor bewildered creature we should have laughed outright, for there was something very ludicrous about the whole proceeding. The men told us that they had been "two mortal hours a-trying to get the daft beast out, but we bain't no forrader than when we begun. We shall have to go back home and get a rope and tie it round her horns and haul her out." Why they had not done this long before when they found their other method of help was unavailing I could not understand, nor could the men explain. How the amusing episode ended I cannot say, as we felt we could not afford to wait till the rope appeared.

At Bourn we found comfortable quarters at the Angel ; this little market town—described by Kingsley as lying "between the forest and the Fen" —though clean and neat, is more interesting historically than picturesquely. Bourn claims to be the birthplace of that Saxon patriot Hereward the Wake,

who may well be termed the hero of the Lowlands. How is it, I wonder, that the daring deeds of Highlanders of all nations appeal so much more to most poetic and prose writers, and to the multitude generally, than the equally valiant achievements of the Lowlanders? Was not the long struggle of the Dutch for freedom as heroic and as worthy of laudatory song as that of the Swiss mountaineers?

The landlord of our inn pointed out to us the site of the castle of the Wakes in a field not far from the market-place. "Some dungeons had been discovered there many years ago," we were informed, "but now there are no remains of any masonry visible," and we found it as the landlord said. All that we observed on the spot were some grass-grown mounds, manifestly artificial, and the traces of the moat. Close by is a large pool of water, supplied by a never-failing spring that bubbles up from below; this pool overflows into a wide stream "that goes right round the town." Kingsley describes the site as being "not on one of the hills behind, but on the dead flat meadow, determined doubtless by the noble fountain, bourn, or brunne, which rises among the earthworks, and gives its name to the whole town. In the flat meadow bubbles up still the great pool of limestone water, crystal clear, suddenly and at once; and runs away, winter and summer, a stream large enough to turn many a mill, and spread perpetual verdure through the flat champaign lands."

What struck us, however, as being the most interesting feature in Bourn—which though a very ancient town has an aggravating air of newness

generally about it, even our little inn was quite modern—was its old railway station. I must confess, at the same time, that I do not remember ever having admired a railway station before for its beauty. But this is, or was, not a modern railway station but a genuine sixteenth-century one! I am writing seriously, let me explain the mystery. When the line was being constructed it passed close alongside of an ancient and charmingly picturesque Elizabethan mansion, known as the Old Red Hall, which for a long while was the residence of the Digby family, who were implicated in the Gunpowder Plot: it was here, according to tradition, that the Guy Fawkes conspiracy was originated in 1604. The intention was, I understand, in due course to pull this ancient structure down and to erect a station on its site. But sundry antiquaries, learning what was proposed to be done, arose in arms against such a proceeding and prevailed; so for once I am glad to record that the picturesque scored in the struggle with pure utilitarianism. A rare victory! The old-time building, often painted by artists and appearing in more than one Academy picture, was happily spared from destruction and was converted into a very quaint, if slightly dark and inconvenient railway station: its hall doing duty as a booking-office, one of its mullion-windowed chambers being turned into a waiting-room, another into a cloak-room, and so forth. Thus matters remained until a year or so ago, when a brand new station, convenient and ugly, was constructed a little farther along the line, and the old house, one of the finest remaining

Elizabethan red-brick mansions in the kingdom, became the stationmaster's home—happy stationmaster! So it was that until quite recently Bourn boasted the unique possession of a medieval railway station!

Passing Bourn church on the way back to our inn we observed a notice attached to the door, of a tax for Fen drainage and the maintenance of the dykes, a shilling an acre being levied for this purpose "and so on in rateable proportion for any less quantity." This called to our mind the ceaseless care that is needed to prevent these rich lands from flooding and becoming mere unprofitable marshes again, and the amount of the tax does not seem excessive for the security afforded thereby. On a tombstone in the graveyard here, we came upon, for the third time this journey, the often-quoted epitaph to a blacksmith, beginning :—

> My sledge and hammer lie reclined,
> My bellows too have lost their wind,
> My fire's extinct, my forge decayed,
> And in the dust my vice is laid.
>
> . . . .

This familiar inscription has been stated by guide-book compilers to be found in this churchyard and that; the lines, however, had a common origin, being first written by the poet Hayley for the epitaph of one William Steel, a Sussex blacksmith, and cut on his tombstone in the churchyard of Felpham near Bognor. The inscription at once became popular, and was freely copied all over England, like the ubiquitous and intensely irritating "Diseases sore

long time he bore, Physicians were in vain," etc. In a similar manner, though to a far less extent, the quaint epitaph that formerly existed in a private chapel in Tiverton churchyard, to Edward Courtenay, the third Earl of Devon, and his Countess, appears to have been copied with variations. Writing early in the seventeenth century, Risdon, in his *Survey of Devonshire*, gives this epitaph thus :—

Hoe! hoe! who lies here?
'Tis I, the good Erle of Devonshire,
With Kate my wife to mee full dere,
Wee lyved togeather fyfty-fyve yere.
That wee spent we had,
That wee lefte wee loste,
That wee gave wee have. 1419.

This appeared in old Doncaster church in the following form :—

Hoe! hoe! who is heare?
I Robin of Doncaster and Margaret my feare.
That I spent I had,
That I gave I have,
That I left I lost. A.D. 1579.

A near relation to this may be found on a brass at Foulsham near Reepham in Norfolk, that reads :—

Of all I had, this only now I have,
Nyne akers wh unto ye poore I gave,
Richard Fenn who died March ye 6. 1565.

But now that I have got upon the attractive subject of epitaphs again, I must control my pen or I shall fill up pages unawares : already I find I have strayed far away from Lincolnshire.

CHAPTER XI

A pleasant road—Memories—Shortening of names—Health-drinking—A miller and his mill—A rail-less town—Changed times and changed ways—An Elizabethan church clock—A curious coincidence—Old superstitions—Satire in carving—"The Monks of Old."

From Bourn we decided to drive to Sleaford, an easy day's stage of eighteen miles, baiting half-way at Falkingham. Upon asking the ostler about the road, it struck us as curious to hear him remark that it was a hilly one; so accustomed had we become to the level roads of the Fens that for the moment we had forgotten that Lincolnshire is a county of heaths, hills, and waving woods as well as of fens, dykes, and sluggish streams.

The aspect of the country we passed through that morning had completely changed from that of yesterday; it was pleasantly undulating, and even the brake was brought into requisition once or twice, for the first time since we left London. Hedges again resumed their sway, and we realised their tangled beauties all the more for our recent absence from them; sturdy oaks and rounded elms took the place of the silvery flickering willows and of the tall thin poplars, and smooth-turfed meadows that of the coarse-grassed marsh-lands. The general

forms and outlines of the country were more familiar, but it seemed a little wanting in colour after the rich tints of the lowlands; by contrast it all appeared too green: green fields, green trees, green crops, for these, with the winding road, chiefly composed the prospect. Moreover, we missed the constant and enlivening accompaniment of water that we had become so accustomed to, with its soft, silvery gleaming under cloud and its cheerful glittering under sun. Water is to the landscape what the eye is to the human face; it gives it the charm of expression and vivacity. At first, also, our visions seemed a little cramped after the wide and unimpeded prospects of the Fens; and the landscape struck us as almost commonplace compared with that we had so lately passed through, which almost deserved the epithet of quaint, at least to non-Dutch eyes. There was no special feature in the present scenery beyond its leafy loveliness. Truly it might be called typically English, but there was nothing to show that it belonged to any particular portion of England—no distant peep of downs, or hills, or moors, that seems so little, but which to the experienced traveller means so much, as by the character and contour of distant hill, or moor, or down he can tell fairly well whether he be in the north or south, the east or west, and may even shrewdly guess the very county he is traversing.

It was, however, a lovely country, full of pastoral peacefulness, sunshine, and grateful sylvan shadiness, lovely yet lonely—a loneliness that aroused within us a feeling akin to melancholy: it may

have been our mood that saw it so that day, and that the fault lay in ourselves and not in the landscape. Does not the poet say, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought"? So may not the sweetest scenery, in certain minds, and under certain conditions, arouse a sentiment of sadness? There is a peacefulness that is restful beyond words, especially to the town-wearied brain; but there is also a peacefulness so deep as to become actually oppressive. However, all the feelings of loneliness and melancholy vanished, like the mist before the sun, at the sight of an old-fashioned windmill painted a cheerful white and picturesquely situated at the top of a knoll by the side of our road, its great sails whirling round and round with a mighty sweep and a swishing sound as they rushed through the air in their never-completed journey. This busy mill gave just the touch of needful life to the prospect; we hailed it as we would have hailed an old friend, and at once our spirits rose to a gleesome point. What trifles may thus suddenly change the current of thought and feeling! It may even be so small a matter as the scent of a wild flower, or the sound of the wind in the trees, recalling past days and far-away scenes. So this old mill brought up before us a rush of pleasant memories, the poetry of many a rural ramble, of chats with merry meal-covered millers, for millers I have ever found to be the merriest of men, and never yet have I come upon a crusty one. All those to whom I have talked, and they have not been few, without exception appeared to take a rosy view

of life, not even grumbling with cause. I wish I knew the miller's secret of happiness!

It was whilst watching the hurtling sails of the creaking mill that it occurred to us why the country seemed so dull that day; it was the absence of movement, we had the road all to ourselves. There was no flowing river or running stream, and the cattle in the fields were lazy and placid, seemingly as immovable as those in pictures; not even troubling to whisk their tails at real or imaginary flies. Even the birds appeared too indolent to fly; at least they were strangely invisible. An air of solemn repose pervaded the whole countryside until that cheery windmill came into view. It was curious that at the moment the only life in the landscape should be given to it by a building! for the mind pictures a building as a substantial thing not given to any movement.

Shortly after this we reached the pretty and picturesquely situated village of Aslackby—shortened to Asby by a native of whom we asked its name—even the rustic has come into line with the late nineteenth century, so far as not to waste breath or words. The straggling village was situated in a wooded hollow a little below our road; its ancient church and cottages, half drowned in foliage, formed a charming picture. The church looked interesting, but we found the door carefully locked, and not feeling just then our archæological and antiquarian zeal sufficient to induce us to go a-clerk-hunting, a doubtful joy at the best, we quietly, and, I fear, unregretfully, resumed our seats in the dog-cart, for

the soft sunshine and sweet air were grateful to our senses, and it pleased us to be out in the open.

Just beyond Aslackby a wayside inn ycleped "The Robin Hood" invited us with the following lines on its sign-board, though unavailingly, to stop and refresh ourselves there:—

> Gentlemen if you think good,
> Step in and drink with Robin Hood:
> If Robin Hood abroad is gone,
> Pray take a glass with Little John.

Noting us stop to take down the inscription, and possibly mistaking our motive, the familiar incident once more took place—a beery-looking passer-by approached us and remarked that he could recommend the tap. We thanked him for his kindness, and jokingly responded that we did not happen to be thirsty just then, but we would bear in mind his recommendation should we ever again be in the neighbourhood. "Not thirsty on such a day as this," he exclaimed with an air of surprise; "why, I be as thirsty as a fish"; but we did not rise to the occasion, and as we drove away the man glanced reproachfully after us, then he disappeared within the building. Perhaps we might have parted with the customary twopence, for the man was civil-mannered, but why should the wanderer by road in England be so frequently expected to have his health drunk by utter strangers? The number of twopences I have already expended for this purpose since I first started my driving tours must be considerable!

Some way farther on our road we chanced upon

still another ancient wooden mill busily at work like the former one. It was a picturesque mill of a primitive type that is fast disappearing from the land; the whole structure being supported on a great central post that acts as a pivot, and is bodily turned on this by a long projecting beam acting as a lever, so that the sails can be made to face the wind from whichever quarter it may come; but this arrangement, of course, needs constant watchfulness.

We pulled up here in order to make a sketch of the old mill, that looked almost too quaint and picturesque to be real, giving one a sort of impression that it must have come out of some painting, an artist's ideal realised. The worthy miller watched our proceeding with manifest interest from his doorway above, and when we had finished he asked us if we would care to take a glance inside. We did care, and likewise were not averse to have the opportunity of a chat so that we might gather his view of the world and of things in general, for naturally everybody sees the former from his own centre, and through his own glasses. We had to mount a number of rickety steps that communicated with the creaking mill above which oscillated unpleasantly, for the sails were spinning round apace before the breeze, causing the ancient structure to tremble and its timbers to groan like those of a ship in a gale; indeed, when we had safely surmounted the flight of shaking steps we felt that we sadly needed our "sea-legs" to stand at all, and the latter are not always immediately at command when cruising on land. "She's running a bit free to-day," exclaimed

the miller, smiling and all gray-white with dusty meal, "and she's not so young as she were by a couple of centuries or so, but she's quite safe though she do rock and rattle a bit. But Lor' bless you, I likes to hear her talk; it's company like, for it's lonely work up here by oneself all day at times." It was not only that the ancient mill moved and shook so, but the floor was uneven as well, nor was there overmuch elbow-room to allow a margin for unsteadiness, and it would have been awkward to have been caught by any of the whirring wheels; moreover the noise was confusing and the light seemed dim for the moment after the bright sunshine without. But we soon got used to the new condition of things and our novel and unstable surroundings.

"I wonder she has never been blown right over in a storm during all those years," I said, "for she is only supported on a single post, though certainly it is a big one." In truth the mill shook so much in the comparatively steady breeze that it seemed to us a heavy storm would easily have laid her low. Mills, like ships, are always "she's," I have observed, though how a man-of-war can be a "she" has always puzzled me. "Well, she may be only supported on one post, but that is of solid heart of oak, as whole and strong to-day as when first put up; not worm-eaten a bit. There's an old saying you may have heard, 'there's nothing like leather'; it ought to be, I thinks, by rights, 'there's nothing like oak.' She do rock though when it blows hard, but I'm used to it; it's her nature, and she'll last

my life. Oh yes, she's very old-fashioned and slow, but for all that she can grind corn better nor your modern mills, in spite of what people talk. We grinds the wheat and makes honest meal; the modern mills with their rollers make simply flour, which is not half as wholesome or nourishing. Wheat-meal and flour are not the same, though they both make bread: wheat-meal possesses nourishing qualities that ordinary flour does not." So one drives about country and learns!

The miller looked an oldish man, but his face and beard (I think he had a beard, but my memory may be at fault) were white from dusty meal, and may have made him appear older than he really was. Anyhow, we ventured to ask him if he thought times had altered for the better or for the worse since he was young. Like the rest of the world, merry miller though he was, he complained of the severe competition that had cut down profits to a minimum, whilst the work was harder. In "the good old days" of milling, when he began the trade, the price for grinding corn used to be 1s. a strike or 8s. a quarter for wheat, and 8d. a strike or 5s. 4d. a quarter for barley; now the charge is 5s. 4d. a quarter for wheat, and 2s. 6d. a quarter for barley. "Moreover, nowadays, though we gets less money for the work, we have to fetch the corn and take the meal back again; whereas in past times the corn was carted to the mill, and taken away when ground." So that, we were given to understand, besides the lowering of prices there was the cost of cartage to and fro to be taken into con-

sideration. It is the same familiar story of a harder struggle to earn a living, entailing besides a lessened leisure. Some one has to suffer for the benefit of cheap production, and the small man suffers most.

Bidding good-bye to our worthy miller, who, in spite of altered times, had a contented look that a millionaire well might envy, we remounted the dog-cart and soon reached the sleepy, little, and erst market town of Falkingham—a town unknown to Bradshaw, because it has been left out in the cold by the railway, but none the less picturesque on that account! Here the road widened out into a large triangle, the base being at the end farthest away from us; this formed the old market-place, a pleasant open space surrounded by quaint and ancient houses and shops. One of these houses especially interested us, a substantial stone building with mullioned windows, set slightly back from the roadway and approached between two massive pillars surmounted by round stone balls. It was not perhaps actually picturesque, but it had such a charming air of quiet dignity, and looked so historical in a mild manner, as to make the modern villa seem a trumpery affair. It was a house that struck you as having been built originally for the owner to live in and to enjoy, in contradistinction to which the "desirable residence" of to-day always seems to me to be built to sell. The stones of this old house were delightfully toned into a series of delicate grays, enlivened here and there by splashes of gold and silver lichen. What a difference there is between the wealth of colourful hues of a time-tinted

country building and the begrimed appearance of a smoke-stained London dwelling. Age adds beauty to the one; it adds but a depressing gloom to the other.

Right in front of us, at the top of the market-place, stood a fine example of an old coaching inn—a long red-brick structure whose ruddy front showed in pleasant contrast with the gray stone buildings around of earlier date: a plain but comfortable-looking hostelry, its many windows gleaming cheerfully in the sunshine, and having in the centre under the eaves of its roof a reminder of the past in the shape of a sun-dial with a legend upon it; but what that legend was we could not make out, for time and weather had rendered it indistinct. In our mind's eye we pictured to ourselves the outside travellers by the arriving coaches consulting it, and then pulling their cumbersome "verge" watches out of their fobs to see if they were correct. Sun-dials, besides being picturesque, were of real utility in the days when watches and clocks could not always be relied upon to tell the right time.

Of old, Falkingham was on the high turnpike road from London to Lincoln, therefore the traffic passing through the little town in the coaching age must have been considerable, and the place must have presented a very different aspect then from the one of slumberous tranquillity it now possesses. Our inn, "The Greyhound" to wit, I find duly recorded in my copy of *Paterson* as supplying post-horses. I well remember my grandfather expatiating upon the pleasures of a driving tour in his

young days when he left home with his travelling carriage packed, but without horses, as he posted from town to town and place to place, without the shadow of anxiety about the "cattle," or having any need to consider whether this or that stage was too long. It was expensive travelling doubtless, but delightfully luxurious and free from care, except for the bogey of the highwayman; but every pleasure has its shadow! The Greyhound has manifestly been but little altered since the last coach pulled up there, beyond that the great arched entrance-way in the centre has been glazed and converted into a hall, which may or may not be an improvement: personally, for tradition's sake, I look jealously upon any modifications in the economy of these ancient coaching houses; but one cannot keep the hand of Time back just for the sake of tradition or the picturesque.

Having refreshed ourselves very satisfactorily here, our roast beef being washed down with a foaming tankard of genuine home-brewed ale, we set out to have a quiet look at the clean past-time town, which, as a matter of fact, we could take in at a glance, for it was all gathered round its large old market-square, though market-triangle would be a more correct term. Falkingham seems never to have known the hand of the modern builder, and has therefore happily preserved its charming old-world look, thanks doubtless in a great measure, if not wholly, to the fact of the railway having left it stranded high and dry out of the traveller's beat.

Our stroll round the square did not take long:

the only inhabitants we saw were an old gaffer talking across a garden wall to a woman who stood in her doorway listlessly listening to him; we were much amused to hear the former suddenly exclaim, just as we passed by, "Why, bless my soul, I've been over half an hour here; I must go now and have a chat with old Mother Dash." It suggested to us that his life was mostly composed of gossiping, and that time was not such a priceless commodity at Falkingham as in most places. Here at least the hurry and rush, the stress and striving of the nineteenth century appear not to have penetrated, and humanity rusts rather than wears away. Can this be due to the mere absence of the railway, I wonder? Certainly where the iron horse does not penetrate, life seems to be lived at a lower pressure than elsewhere. A deep sense of repose hung over the whole place, a peacefulness that could possibly be felt; for a town it was unnaturally—painfully I might almost say—silent: in the heart of the country we could not have found a greater tranquillity!

Having "done" the town and having added a few more pencil notes to our sketch-book, on glancing around we suddenly espied the church half hidden away in a corner to the left of our inn that somehow we had hitherto overlooked. Approaching the aged fane we noticed a great clock-face on the weather-worn and hoary tower with a solitary wooden hand thereon pointing aimlessly down to six; it was then a few minutes to one, for we had lunched early, having started in the

morning "betimes," to once again employ Mr. Pepys's favourite expression. For when driving across country it is well to have a long day before one; even then the whole day was sometimes too short!

Affixed to the porch of the church we observed the following notice, that plainly tells its own tale of changed times and changed ways, and of an enlightened, up-to-date ecclesiasticism :—

Cyclists Welcomed
In Cycling Dress.

Entering the building we heard a peculiar creaking noise, apparently proceeding from the tower above, that was in singular contrast with the otherwise profound stillness of the interior. This puzzled us, and, discovering a circular stone stairway that led up the tower, we promptly ascended it to solve the mystery. This eventually—after climbing over one hundred steps (we counted them)—took us into a small chamber, where we found the sexton winding up an ancient clock of curious design, an interesting specimen of medieval handicraft. I sincerely trust that no agent from South Kensington or other museum, or any emissary from Wardour Street, will unearth this antique "time-teller," or if unhappily they do, I trust that they will not be permitted to possess it, even though they promise a brand new clock in its place! I prefer to see such curiosities in their rightful positions, where they ought to remain their natural life undisturbed, and where alone they are in harmony with their surroundings. Many an ancient

helmet, that once hung over the recumbent effigy of its former knightly owner in the quiet village church, has been basely filched away to add to the collector's store, where they may only be seen by the favoured few, and why should this be? The queer old clock was being wound up, not by a key, but by a sort of miniature windlass. The works were of wrought iron, all hammered and cut by hand, for machinery manifestly had no part in their construction; perhaps that is why they have lasted so long! From our knowledge of such things, we concluded that this clock could not have been of later date than Elizabeth's time; how much earlier, if any, it would be hard to say. Unless, however, we are greatly mistaken, it has outlived three centuries, and has probably marked the hours all those long years, more or less correctly, whilst the cunning hands that designed and constructed it are forgotten dust. Here the inevitable moral should follow, but I refrain. This reminds me that I once gave my thirteen-year-old daughter an improving, well-intentioned book, and in due course I asked her how she liked it: "Well, dada," she replied, quite innocently, "when you've skipped all the goody bits there's nothing left!" A brass plate attached to the clock informed us that

W. Foster
Repaired this Clock
Anno Domini
1816.

We understood that, so far as the sexton knew, it had not been repaired since that date. Then we called

the sexton's attention to the fact that the face of the clock had but one hand, and that was loose and moved to and fro in the wind as helplessly as a weather-vane: "Yes," he replied with a grin, "I had to pull the other hand off; it caught in the wind so as to slow the clock, and when it blew hard sometimes it stopped her going altogether. I left the other hand on, as being loose it could do no harm"! This sounded a delightfully primitive way out of a mechanical difficulty; quite a stroke of rural genius! At the same time it appeared to us strangely inconsistent and illogical to have a clock going that did not show the time. "Lor' bless you, sir," responded he, "the old clock strikes the hours right enough, and that's all the folk want to know. Why, if the hands were going they'd never look up at 'em. Not they." What a lotus-eating land this, we thought, where people only care to know the hours, and take no thought of the intervals! Just then the sexton began to toll a loud bell vigorously. In reply to our query for the reason of this, he explained that it was the custom there to ring the bell every morning at eight o'clock, and again at one o'clock, "and it's one o'clock now, and so I'm ringing of it. I don't rightly know how old the custom be, but the bell be very useful, as it lets the people at work in the fields around know the time. We calls this the dinner bell. You see it carries farther than the sound of the clock striking."

We then ventured to admire the old tower, a fine specimen of Perpendicular masonry, possessing some much-weathered, curious but rather coarse gargoyles

outside. The sexton also admired it: "It certainly be a fine tower; there's a wonderfully good view of the country round from the top. I allus goes up there when the hounds be out to see the run. I know no other tower in the district from which you can see so far. Now, if them old builders had only," etc., etc. I am afraid the sexton and ourselves regarded the old tower from two very dissimilar standpoints.

Descending into the body of the church, we noticed a doorway in the south wall, and caught a peep of some stone steps beyond, leading, we were informed, to a chamber over the porch formerly used as a schoolroom, "now we only keep rubbish in it, odd tiles, broken bits of carvings, and the like. You can go up if you care to, but it be rare and dusty." We did care to go up. Indeed, in the fondness of our heart for such things we even dared to hope that perchance we might, to use an expressive term much favoured by antiquaries, come upon "a find" there. Here, we reasoned, is a fine and ancient church, well out of the beaten track of travel. The present interior suggested that it had once been richly adorned; presumably it had suffered, more or less, the fate of other ornate churches during the Commonwealth. Who can tell but that some quaint relic of its former beauty may not be stowed away up there amongst the rubbish? The very mention of "odd tiles" sounded encouraging, only supposing that there happened to be some quaint medieval ones amongst the number! So, full of pleasant anticipation, we eagerly ascended the steep stone steps, worn

both very concave and slippery with the tread of generations departed. We reached a large parvise, or priest's chamber, provided with a fireplace; the uneven floor was strewn with bits of broken tiles, worm-eaten wood, plaster, bricks, etc. The chamber was exceedingly dusty and cobwebby, but we at once enthusiastically began to search amongst the litter for anything of interest, but, alas! discovered nothing noteworthy; the tiles were modern. The sexton was right after all—it was full of rubbish! So, disappointed and almost as white as a miller, we descended the slippery steps. Then as the sexton —there was no clerk, he informed us—seemed in a chatty mood, we asked him if he knew of any curious inscription in the churchyard. "Well, I think I can show you one that will interest you," he replied, whereupon he led the way outside and we followed. Coming to an old tombstone he remarked, "Now, I call this a funny one; it is to a man and his wife who both died in the same year, and were both exactly the same age to a day when they died." Then he rubbed the ancient stone over with his hand, that we might better read what was written thereon, which I copied as follows:—

To
The Memory of
JOHN BLAND
Who Died March 25th, 1797,
Aged 75 Years, 6 Weeks, and 4 Days.

Also of
JANE, his Widow
Who Died May 11th, 1797,
Aged 75 Years, 6 Weeks, and 4 Days.

Provided the inscription records facts, it certainly is a curious coincidence; still quite a possible one.

Returning to our inn, we ordered the horses to be "put to," and whilst this was being done, we had a chat with the landlord, from whom we learnt that he both brewed his own ale and grew his own barley to brew it with. It is the pleasant fate of some of these remote old coaching hostelries in their old age to become half hotel and half farmhouse, and a more fortunate combination for the present-day traveller there could not be. By this arrangement the old buildings are preserved and cared for in a manner that diminished custom would hardly permit were they to remain purely as inns; nor does the providing suffer from the blending of uses, the produce of the farm being at command, which means, or should mean, fresh vegetables, milk, butter, and eggs. In the present case it further meant the rare luxury of home-brewed ale from home-grown grain, and a quart of such, does not Shakespeare say, "is a dish for a king"?

We drove on now through a pretty and well-wooded country, our road winding in and out thereof in the most enticing manner: every now and then we caught refreshing peeps of a far-away distance, faintly blue, out from which came to us a fragrant breeze, cool, sweet, and soothing. In driving across country it is not only the prospect that changes but the air also, and, as the eye delights in the change of scene, so the lungs rejoice in the change of climate. The landscape all around had a delightfully fresh and smiling look; it was intensely pastoral and peaceful, and over all there brooded a sense of deep

contentment and repose. Old time-mellowed farmsteads and quiet cottage homes were dotted about, from which uprose circling films of blue-gray smoke, agreeably suggestive of human occupancy. "How English it all looked," we exclaimed, and these five words fitly describe the scenery. In that sentence pages of word-painting are condensed!

As we proceeded above the woods to the left and the right of us rose two tall tapering spires, belonging respectively—at least so we made out from our map—to the hamlets of Walcot and Treckingham. These spires reminded us what splendid churches some of the small Lincolnshire villages possess; there they stand in remote country districts often hastening to decay, with no one to admire them. The ancient architects who

> Built the soaring spires
> That sing their soul in stone,

seem to have built these songs in vain: for what avails a poem that no one prizes? The Lincolnshire rustic is made of stern stuff, he is honest, hardy, civil, manly, independent (at least that is the opinion I have formed of him), but he is not a bit poetical, and a good deal of a Puritan: I fancy, if I have read him aright, he would as soon worship in a barn as in a church; indeed, I think he would prefer to do so if he had his own way, as being more homelike. A clergyman I met on the journey and who confided in me said, "To get on in Lincolnshire, before all things it is necessary to believe in game, and not to trouble too much about

the Catholic faith." He said this in a joking manner truly, but I could see that he jested in earnest: he further assured me as a positive fact that both devil-worship and a belief in witchcraft existed in the county. He said, "I could tell you many strange things of my rural experiences," and he did—how the devil is supposed to haunt the churchyards in the shape of a toad, and how witchcraft is practised, etc. "You may well look astonished," he exclaimed, "at what I tell you, but these things are so; they have come under my notice, and I speak advisedly from personal knowledge."

Presently we reached the village of Osbournby; here the church looked interesting, so we stopped in order to take a glance inside, and were well rewarded for our trouble by discovering a number of very fine and quaintly-carved medieval bench-ends in an excellent state of preservation. Medieval carvings have generally a story to tell, though being without words some people are forgetful of the fact, deeming them merely ornamental features, and so miss the carver's chief aim because they do not look for it; sometimes, by way of relief, they have a joke to make, now and then they are keenly sarcastic: but the stories—not the jokes—mostly need time to elucidate, for they often mean more than meets the eye at a hurried glance; moreover they have to be read in the spirit of the age that produced them. One of the bench-end carvings at Osbournby that is particularly noticeable represents a cunning-looking fox standing up in a pulpit

preaching to a silly-looking congregation of geese, a favourite subject by the way with the monkish sculptors, and a telling contemporary satire on the priesthood by those who ought to know it best. It is remarkable that this peculiar subject should have been so popular, for I have met with it frequently; there is a good example of the same on one of the miserere seats in St. David's Cathedral. What does it signify?

Still more curious does this strange satire seem when we remember that in the dark ages such carvings were the poor man's only literature, for then even reading was a polite art confined to the learned few, and spelling was in its infancy. One finds it difficult to conjecture why the Church allowed such ridicule of its religious preaching to be thus boldly proclaimed, so that even the unlettered many could hardly fail to comprehend its meaning, for in this case the story meets the eye at once and was manifestly intended to do so.

If we may judge them solely by their carvings the monks of old, at a certain period, appear to have been craftsmen clever beyond cavil, full of quaint conceits, not over refined, often sarcastic, sometimes severely so, but curiously broad in their selection of subjects for illustration. Of course they carved religious subjects as in duty bound, and with painstaking care, but these all look stiff and mechanical, forced and not spontaneous, possibly because they had to work more or less in a traditional groove, and consequently there was no scope for originality; but in their less serious

moments, and these seemed many, when the mood inclined them they wrought carvings that were imbued with life; and laughed, or grinned, or joked in stone or wood to their heart's content; then the whole soul of the craftsman entered into his work—and the inanimate matter lived, breathed, and struggled. His comicalities are simply delightful; he was the medieval Leech and Keene! Truly not all the old monks took religion seriously! but whatever their virtues or failings they were artists of no mean merit.

CHAPTER XII

A civil tramp—Country hospitality—Sleaford—A Lincolnshire saying—A sixteenth-century vicarage—Struck by lightning—"The Queen of Villages"—A sculptured anachronism—Swineshead—A strange legend—Local proverbs—Chat with a "commercial"—A mission of destruction—The curfew—Lost our way—Out of the beaten track—A grotesque figure and mysterious legend—Puzzling inscriptions—The end of a long day.

JOURNEYING leisurely on we presently arrived at the curiously entitled village of Silk Willoughby; here again on asking the name of the place, which we did before consulting our map, a native shortened it to Silkby. It is a marked tendency of the age to contract the spelling and the pronunciation of names to an irreducible minimum,—a tendency that I have already remarked upon. Well, perhaps for everyday speech, Silk Willoughby is rather overlong, and the more concise Silkby serves all needful purposes. Still this pronouncing of names differently from what they are spelt on the map is sometimes inconvenient to the stranger, as the natives have become so accustomed to the abbreviated expression that the full title of a place, given precisely as on the map, is occasionally unfamiliar to them, and they will declare hopelessly that they "never heard of no such

place." On the other hand, once when driving in Worcestershire we were sadly puzzled when a tramp asked us if he were on the right road to "Kiddy"; it eventually turned out that he wanted to get to Kidderminster. I verily believe, tramp though he was, that he looked upon us as ignoramuses in not recognising that curt appellation for the town in question! He was a civil tramp though, for there are such beings in the world, and we always make it a point to return civility with civility, whether it be a ploughboy or a lord who is addressing us. "Well now," he exclaimed in genuine surprise as we parted, "to thinks that you should not know that Kidderminster is called Kiddy. Why, I thought as how everybody knew that." In Sussex, too, once when driving near Crowborough a man in a trap shouted to us to know if he were "right for the Wells," for the moment it did not occur to us that he meant Tunbridge Wells, but that we discovered was what he did mean.

In Silk Willoughby, by the roadside, we noticed some steps with the stump of the shaft of the village cross on the top; on four sides of the base of this were the carved symbols of the Evangelists, much worn but still traceable. We found that these steps, as is frequently the case, formed a rendezvous and a playing-place for the village children, a fact that can hardly tend to the preservation of the carvings!

As we had got down to make a sketch of the ruined cross we thought we might as well walk

across the road and have a look at the ancient church. On reaching this the first thing that attracted our attention was the following, "John Oak, Churchwarden, 1690," cut boldly straight across the old oak door, though why John Oak's name should be inscribed in such a prominent position, and handed down to posterity thus I cannot say. Possibly he presented the door to the church — though it looks older than the date mentioned—and modestly inscribed his name thereon to record his gift.

Within we found the building in a state of picturesque but pathetic decay. Right in the centre of the nave was a big wooden post reaching straight up from the stone slab floor to support the open timber roof above; all the windows, except one to the right of the chancel which from its position was hidden from the general view, had lost their stained glass; and a huge horizontal beam that stretched across the chancel also blocked the top of the east window,—the unhappy result of a previous restoration we were informed. On the floor we noticed an incised slab inscribed to the memory of one of the Armyn family; this bore the date of MCCCLXVIIII, and was decorated with a finely engraved cross, and a shield charged—I believe that is the correct heraldic term—with a coat-of-arms. Another old tombstone laid on the floor, having an inscription the lettering of which was deeply cut, we should have liked to decipher, for it looked of interest, but as the greater part was covered by a pew this was impossible.

Whilst we were endeavouring, with but small success, to puzzle out some Latin (or dog-Latin) verse on an ancient brass, the rector made his appearance, and, learning that we were driving across country and strangers in the land, forthwith invited us to the rectory for afternoon tea. Such kindly attentions had become quite customary features of our wanderings, so much so that we had ceased to wonder at them, and we greatly regretted in this instance to be obliged to decline such thoughtfully proffered hospitality, as we had no means of lengthening out the day to embrace all our pleasures! Truly the lot of the driving tourist is an enviable one, a very enviable one when it takes him into the pleasant land of Lincolnshire: a delightful thing it is to experience this old-time friendliness—a friendliness that makes the wheels of life run so smoothly, and reveals the gracious and sunny side of human nature.

A mural tablet in the chancel rather amused us by the invitation contained in the first two lines of a long inscription,

> Kind stranger stay a moment ere you go,
> Attend and view this monumental show.

Thus were we bidden to read through a tedious and wordy eulogy upon a youth whose only distinction appeared to be that he died young,—there is such a thing as consistency in epitaphs, the tomb of many a hero takes up less space than this one! The famous Speaker Lenthall of the Long Parliament directed that "no monument whatever should be

placed over him, save only a plain stone slab with the two words

Vermis Sum."

But he was a great man and lives in history. Frank Osborne, the author and moralist, and contemporary of Speaker Lenthall, also dictated the epitaph on his simple tombstone at Netherworton in Oxfordshire, in which he pertinently remarks:

> I envy not those graves which take up room
> Merely with Jetts and Porphyry: since a tomb
> Adds no desert.

After all, simplicity and brevity of epitaph appeal more to the heart of man than fulsome eulogy or "monumental show."

In the chancel wall, immediately to the left of the east window, is a tall narrow niche. The rector said he did not know the original purpose of this, unless it were for ornament. The niche was too tall for a statue, and we imagined from its form that probably it was intended, of old, to receive the processional cross—the pre-Reformation churches being, I believe, provided with a recess or a locker for this purpose. A specimen of the latter, with the ancient ornamented oak door still in position, may be found in the church at Barnby in Suffolk.

Then, bidding good-bye to the courteous and hospitable rector, we once more resumed our pleasant pilgrimage, and, passing through an eye-refreshing and peace-bestowing country of green meadows, waving woods, and silvery streams, we reached the

ancient town of Sleaford just as the sun was setting red in the west, a fact, according to the well-known proverb—which however we have not found to be perfectly reliable—that should ensure fine weather for the morrow—"Red at night is a shepherd's delight; red in the morning is a shepherd's warning." Well, I am not a shepherd, but speaking from my experience as a road traveller, who naturally studies the weather, I have frequently noted that a red morning has been followed by a gloriously fine and sunny day. When, however, the sky is a wan yellow at sunrise, and especially if the wind be south-westerly, then you may expect rain before evening with some degree of certainty; but of all things to dogmatise about, the English weather is the most dangerous.

As we entered Sleaford we noticed a monument to a local celebrity, the designer of which we imagined had been inspired by the excellent example of a Queen Eleanor's Cross. The structure certainly adds interest to the street in which it stands, and this is a great deal more than can be said of most memorials of notables in the shape of statues, which, perched high on pedestals, are generally prominent eyesores that a long-suffering community has to put up with. Close to this monument was a pump, below which a basin was inscribed, "Every good gift is from above." The quotation did not strike us as the most appropriate that might be chosen, as the pump was erected for the purpose of obtaining water from below.

Sleaford, on the day we arrived, offered a great

contrast to the slumberous quiet of Falkingham, for it was the evening of the annual sheep fair, and groups of agriculturists were scattered about engaged in eager conversation, and flocks of sheep were being driven out of the town, with much shouting, dog-barking, and commotion, and farmers in gigs or on horseback starting back home added to the general restlessness. Indeed, after the deep tranquillity of the lonely country roads we had traversed that day, Sleaford seemed a place of noise and bustle. Next morning, however, we found the streets quiet enough, as we remarked to a stranger in the stable-yard. "Yes," he said, "Sleaford is quiet enough. It sleeps more or less all the year, but wakes up once for the annual fair. You mayn't have heard the saying, 'Sleaford for sleep, Boston for business, Horncastle for horses, Louth for learning.'" "Perhaps," responded we, mindful of yesterday, "as it is Horncastle for horses, it should be Sleaford for sheep, not 'sleep.'" The two words sound very much alike. But our suggestion was scorned.

Rambling about the town we noted the date of 1568 on a gable of the half-timbered and creeper-clad vicarage, that stood divided by a footpath from the church. A noble structure the latter, with a most effectively picturesque front owing to the fact that the aisles are lengthened so as to be in level line with the tower; the pierced parapet extending across this long front is adorned with bell-turrets, pinnacles, and minarets, forming a varied outline against the sky. Whilst we were taking a pencil

outline of this charming specimen of ancient architecture, a man in dark tweeds approached us, who said he was an amateur photographer, and would give us a photograph of the building if we liked. We thanked him very much for his kindness, but he did not go home to fetch the said photograph, as we expected, but stood watching us finish our sketch. Then we made some random remark to the effect that it was a very fine church,—we had nearly said "a very fine day," from sheer custom, but checked ourselves half-way. In conversation we always endeavour to keep the weather back as a last resource; but old crusted habits are difficult to conquer. "Yes," he agreed, "it's a fine church, but it was finer before the tower was knocked down." For a moment we imagined that we were talking with an escaped lunatic; we had never heard of a church tower being "knocked down" before! "What," queried we, "did a traction engine run into it, or how did it get knocked down?" The answer was reassuring; we were not talking to a lunatic! "It was knocked down by lightning when I was fifteen years younger than I am now. It happened one Sunday morning during service. The storm came on very suddenly, and I was sheltering in a doorway over yonder. Suddenly there was a blinding flash and a great crack of thunder, and I saw the tower come crashing down with a tremendous roar, followed by a cloud of dust or steam, I'm not sure which. Then the people rushed out of church pell-mell—men without their hats, all in the soaking rain, for it did pour

down, and women screaming. One woman shouted out that the end of the world had come ; it was the sound 'of the last trump,' and it was some time before she became calm. I never saw anything like it." Then he stopped for a moment, and in a more thoughtful tone of voice proceeded, "Do you know that catastrophe set me thinking a good deal. It struck me as very strange that we should build churches for the worship of God, and that God should so often destroy them by lightning. That morning the public-houses escaped hurt, but the church was wrecked by fire from heaven. It does seem strange to me." And he became so engrossed in his talk that he forgot all about the promised photograph, and we did not like to remind him. "Why do you think the church was struck?" he asked us as we parted. "Probably," we replied, "because it was not protected with a conductor, or if it were provided with one it was defective." "But that does not explain why Providence allowed it," he retorted ; but we declined to be drawn into an argument. So we hastened back to our hotel, and, as we had planned a long day's journey, ordered the horses to be "put to" at once.

Our road out of Sleaford led us through a level pastoral land, pleasant enough to look upon, though there was nothing on the way of particular interest to engage our attention till we reached Heckington, a large village known locally, we were told, by the proud title of "the Queen of Villages." It certainly is a pretty place, and it possesses a truly magnificent church that seems, like so many others in Lincoln-

shire, strangely out of proportion to the requirements of the parish. This church has the architectural quality, so rare in English churches, of being all of one period. Like Salisbury Cathedral it has the merit of unity of design. We noticed some fine gargoyles on the tower, and a few statues still remain in the niches thereof. Within, the building hardly comes up to the expectations raised by its splendid exterior. It looks spacious and well proportioned, but cold and bare, possibly chiefly due to the want of stained glass. We noticed the mutilated effigy of an ecclesiastic in an arched recess of the north wall, and above, enclosed within a glass case, was an ancient broken silver chalice, doubtless exhumed from his tomb. But perhaps the greatest thing of archæological interest here is the superb and elaborately carved Easter Sepulchre, the finest we have seen in England. At the base of this are sculptured stone figures representing the Roman guards watching the tomb; and these are shown clad in medieval armour!—a curious instance of inconsistency, but then there were no art critics in those days, and the medieval carver and painter were a law unto themselves! Yet in spite of their oftentimes glaring anachronisms, the works of the medieval artists, be they sculptors or painters, were always effective and suggestive of life, and never failed to be decorative. Modern art, as a rule, simply reverses these conditions. It is above all things correct—more precise than poetical; magnificent in technique, but wanting in spirit.

After Heckington the country became more

wooded, but still uneventful. Crossing a wide dyke that stretched away monotonously straight for miles on either hand, the roof-trees of the little town of Swineshead came into sight peeping above a wealth of foliage. In spite of its unattractive name Swineshead looked a charming place, and as we had already driven eleven miles from Sleaford, we determined that we would make our mid-day halt there, and drive on to Boston in the afternoon.

At Swineshead we found a little inn with stabling attached, the landlord whereof chanced to be standing at his door as we drove up, and after the preliminary greetings he informed us that a hot dinner of roast fowl, etc., would be ready in a few minutes. We were considerably, though pleasantly, surprised at learning this, for Swineshead is a small, primitive town, hardly indeed more than a large village, and our inn had a simple, countrified look in keeping with the place, and a cold repast, therefore, was all we had looked for, but the wanderer by road never knows what surprises are in store for him. The few minutes, however, turned out to be nearly twenty, and whilst waiting in a small parlour for our meal to be served, we amused ourselves by glancing over some odd numbers of old provincial papers that we found there. One may often glean something of interest by studying the pages of local magazines and papers, and we did so on this occasion. In a copy of the *Horncastle News*, dated 9th June 1894, that had somehow been preserved from destruction, our eyes fell upon this paragraph that we deemed worthy of being copied into our notebook. "A

strange legend is current in Swineshead that, 'If a corpse lies in a house on Sunday there will be three within the week.' This saying has been verified twice this year." Which statement, if true as it presumably is, I suppose, serves as an example to show that superstitious sayings may come true at times. When things are possible they may occur; if they never did occur it would be still more wonderful. All the same it is a remarkable coincidence, though of course nothing more, that this "strange legend" should have "been verified twice" in one year. We were amused also by another article in one of the papers that dogmatically settled the everlasting Irish question by stating all that is required is "more pigs and fewer priests." In the same paper we came upon several proverbs, or folk-lore, said to be much employed in Lincolnshire. Apropos of striving after the impossible, we were told: "One might as well try and wash a negro white," or "Try to fill a cask with ale by pouring it in at the bung-hole whilst it ran out at the tap"; we were further informed it was "Like searching for gold at the end of a rainbow." Then followed a saying that house-hunters might consider with advantage, "Where the sun does not come, the doctor does." I have quoted these items chiefly as a sample of the sort of entertainment that is to be found in country papers, a study of which may sometimes while away, profitably or otherwise, those odd five minutes one so often has to spend in country inn parlours.

At last the dinner was served, and an excellent

little dinner it proved to be. At this moment a stranger entered and joined us at our meal. A very talkative individual he proved to be, and we soon discovered that he was a commercial traveller who drove about the country. "Ah!" he remarked, "you've to thank me for this dinner; they knew I was coming, it's my day, and they always have a nice little dinner ready for me. If you had come another day I fancy you would not have fared so well." Then we took the opportunity of discovering how the world looked as seen through the eyes of a commercial traveller. "Yes, I like the life, it's pleasant enough in the summer time driving from place to place. The work is not too hard, and one lives well. But it's the winter time I don't care for. It's not too pleasant then driving in the country when a bitter east wind is blowing, and hail or sleet are dashed against you. The country is very well, and pretty enough in the summer, but I prefer towns in the winter. You get wet driving in the open too at times; now I don't mind being wet and warm, but to be wet and cold is cruel; and mind you, you have always to come up smiling to your customers. Yes, you may well wonder at my coming to such an uncommercial-looking place as Swineshead, but it's in these little country towns nowadays that we do our best trade in spite of appearances; you see they supply the rural folk all around, for these people do not get their goods from the London stores like most of those do who live in the towns. The parcel post makes it hard for the provincial shopkeeper to get a living, it acts as a

huge country delivery for the stores and big shops in London: people write up to town one day and get their goods sent down to their houses the next." Then our commercial suddenly remembered he had business to attend to and took his leave, and we went out for a stroll.

Wandering about we observed the steps and base of the shaft of an ancient market cross by the roadside, for Swineshead was once a market town, also another relic of a past civilisation in the shape of the decayed stocks. Then we took a glance at the interior of the church and found a party of ladies therein busily employed in decorating it for the harvest festival; as we were leaving the vicar made his appearance and kindly volunteered to show us over the building. When he first came there, he informed us, he found the village school was held in a portion of the nave partitioned off for that purpose, and that the children used the graveyard as a playground when the weather was fine, and the interior of the church when it was wet, romping and shouting about, and indulging in the game of hide-and-seek amongst the pews! The pulpit then was of the old "three-decker" type, and the rest of the church furnishings in keeping therewith. This is all changed now, and the church has been restored backwards to something more resembling its primitive condition. Under the communion table we had pointed out to us the original altar-slab with the five crosses thereon, which had been used to pave the church, a fact the vicar discovered in 1870, in this wise. Colonel Holingshead had

been sent there in 1567 "to destroy all superstitious articles," and of his mission thus the Colonel reported: "We came to Swineshead, here we found two altars, one was broken in taking down, one we took entire and laid in on the pavement." After reading this the vicar made search for the latter and found it in the flooring as described. So what one generation removes another restores; one blackens, the other whitens; one has a predilection for ceremony, another for simplicity: it is the everlasting swing of the pendulum first to one side then to the other, there is even a fashion in religion as in all things else, though we may not call or know it by that name. The Puritan claimed that he destroyed beautiful things not because he hated them, but of painful necessity because in churches he found that they were associated with shameful imposture and debasing superstition. To-day the modern Puritan does not appear to object to ornate fanes of worship, he even expresses his admiration of decorative art, it is the ritual and vestments he despises; for thus a famous American puritan writes of Ely Cathedral: "The beauty of Ely is originality combined with magnificence. The cathedral is not only glorious; it is also strange. . . . Its elements of splendour unite to dazzle the vision and overwhelm the soul. . . . When you are permitted to sit there, in the stillness, with no sound of a human voice and no purl of ecclesiastical prattle to call you back to earth, you must indeed be hard to impress if your thoughts are not centred upon heaven. It is the little preacher in his ridiculous vestments, it

is man with his vanity and folly, that humiliates the reverent pilgrim in such holy places as this, by his insistent contrast of his own conventional littleness with all that is celestial in the grandest architectural results of the inspiration of genius." The pointed remark, "no ecclesiastical prattle to call you back to earth," is noteworthy.

At Swineshead we learnt that the curfew is still tolled at eight o'clock every evening for five minutes, and after a short interval this is followed by another bell which tells the date of the month. A quaint local custom, and may it long continue! As we were leaving the church our attention was called to the date 1593, deeply cut on one of the beams of the timber roof, presumably marking the date of its construction, or more probably its restoration.

On leaving Swineshead for Boston we were told to "take the first to the left and then drive straight on, you cannot possibly miss your way. You'll see the stump right before you,"—"the stump" being the local and undignified term by which the lofty tower of Boston's famous church is known. A tower that rises 272 feet boldly up into the air, and is crowned at the top with an open octagonal lantern of stone—a landmark and a sea-mark over leagues of flat Fenland and tumbling waters. This tall tower rising thus stately out of the wide plain has a fine effect, seen from far away it seems to be of a wonderful height, and, as an ancient writer says, "it meets the travellers thereunto twenty miles off, so that their eyes are there many hours before their

feet." This was, of course, before the days of the railway, but it is still true of the leisurely road wanderer.

Though we were told to drive straight on, and that we could not possibly miss our way, we managed very successfully to do the latter, and the former we found difficult of accomplishment, as in due course we came to the junction of two roads, one branching to the left, and the other to the right, and how to drive "straight on" under those circumstances would have puzzled the wisest man. At the point there was no sign-post, nor was there a soul in sight; we consulted our map, but this did not help us, for it mixed up the roads with the dykes in such a puzzling way that we could not make out which was intended for which. We waited some time in the hopes that some one might appear on the scene, but no one did, so at last we selected the right-hand road as tending, if anything, slightly more in the direction of Boston "stump" than the other, nevertheless it proved to be the wrong one, and we presently found ourselves in a maze of byroads complicated with dykes. We were by no means driving "straight on," according to instructions, though we kept the famous "stump" in view and ahead of us, now slightly to the right and now to the left; but in time we found that we were gradually getting nearer to it, which was satisfactory,—and, after all, we reasoned to ourselves, it does not matter greatly how we progress, so long as we do progress and we reach our destination and an inn before nightfall. Our horses are going fresh,

the country is interesting and full of character, and would even probably be pronounced beautiful by a Dutchman!

So by "indirect, crooked ways" we reached Frampton, an out-of-the-world village, a spot where one might go in search of peace when

> weary of men's voices and their tread,
> Of clamouring bells and whirl of wheels that pass.

It seemed a place so very remote from "the busy haunts of men." It impressed us with its restful calm. Here by the side of the road stood its ancient and picturesque church, — we had seen enough churches that day to last for a whole tour, but somehow this rural fane so charmed us that we felt we could not pass it by without a glance; and it was well we did not, for here we made one of the most interesting discoveries of our journey. Strolling round the graveyard in search of any curious epitaph we noticed the quaint carving of a grotesque head on a buttress of the north wall of the building. Upon closer inspection we further discovered a puzzling inscription beneath this, which we made out to be as follows :—

> ✠ Wot ye whi i stond
> Here for i forswor mi fat. . .
> Ego Ricardus in
> Angulo.

We made out the inscription without difficulty, all but the last word of the second line, which appears to begin "fat," but the next letter or letters are undecipherable. We hazarded a guess that the

missing letter might be "f" and that the word was intended for "faith," but it might equally well have ended with the letters "her" and so have read "father." At the time, however, we were inclined to the first rendering, and concluded that the head above was meant to represent a monk who had turned apostate, and, therefore, was placed there in the cold outside the church, and made, like a naughty boy, to stand in the corner.

This grotesque figure with the enigmatical inscription below greatly interested us, so much indeed that we resolved, if by any means it were possible, to obtain the correct interpretation thereof. But we found, somewhat to our surprise, that the few likely people of whom we inquired were not even aware of the existence of such a thing in their neighbourhood. However, after much searching, we heard of a certain learned Lincolnshire antiquary who had long and carefully studied the strange figure and legend; so on our return home we ventured to write and ask him if he could throw any light upon the subject. To our request we received a most courteous reply, an extract from which I hereby give, as it is of much interest, even if it does not actually determine the meaning of the curious bit of sculpturing: "It evidently records some *local* matter or scandal. Looking at the date of the building, and the history of the parish simultaneously, I find a *Richard* Welby, eldest son of Sir Richard Welby, lived then, and that for some unknown cause he was disinherited by his father and the estate went to his next brother. If he 'forswor' either 'faith'

or 'father,' the disinheritance *may* be accounted for, and also its chronicle below this figure in a civilian cap (it may be either civilian or monkish, but I incline to the former). Of course this is only supposition founded upon dates and local history, and may be utterly wrong."

The curious carvings and inscriptions that one comes upon ever and again when exploring rural England are a source of great interest to the traveller of antiquarian tastes, and there are many such scattered over the land of a most puzzling nature. Take the following tombstone enigma, for instance, to be found in Christchurch graveyard in Hampshire. Who will unravel the hidden import of this most mysterious legend? I have tried long and hard to arrive at some probable solution thereof but all in vain.

We were not slayne bvt rays'd,
Rays'd not to life,
But to be bvried twice
By men of strife.
What rest covld the living have
When the dead had none.
Agree amongst yov,
Here we ten are one.

H. Roger. died April 17. 1641.

I. R.

Then again in the church of Great Gidding — a village we passed a little to the left of our road before we reached Stilton — is another carved enigma consisting of the following five Latin words arranged in the form of a square thus :—

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

The meaning of this is not at all clear, to me at any rate. This puzzle bears the date 1614. The following curious inscription, too, was pointed out to me upon a flat, "broken and battered" tombstone that lies in the churchyard of Upton near Slough: "Here lies the body of Sarah Bramstone of Eton, spinster, who dared to be just in the reign of George the Second. Obijt. Janry. 30, 1765, aetat 77." One naturally asks who was this Sarah Bramstone? These records in stone are hard to interpret. Even old drinking vessels, that the wanderer in rural England occasionally unearths, often possess significant inscriptions, as the following example taken from a goblet of the Cromwellian period, I think, sufficiently proves. This certainly suggests a Jacobean origin of our national anthem:—

God save the King, I pray
God bless the King, I say;
God save the King.
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Soon to reign over us;
God save the King.

A few more miles of level winding road through a wooded country brought us in sight of the old historic town of Boston,—a name familiar in two hemispheres. A jumble of red buildings, uneven-roofed, and grouped together in artistic irregularity,

was presented to us; buildings quaint and commonplace, but all glorified in colour by the golden rays of the setting sun, their warm tints being enhanced by broad mysterious shadows of softest blue, mingled with which was a haze of pearly-gray smoke—the very poetry of smoke, so film-like and romantic it seemed. And over all there rose the tall tower of St. Botolph's stately fane, so etherealised by the moist light-laden atmosphere that it looked as unsubstantial as the building of a dream, whilst near at hand tapering masts, tipped with gold, and ruddy sails told of the proximity of the sea. The ancient town had a strangely medieval look, as though we had somehow driven backwards into another century, the glamour of the scene took possession of us, and we began to dream delicious dreams, but just then came wafted on the stilly air the sound of a far-away railway whistle, soft and subdued by distance truly, but for all that unmistakable. The charm of illusion was over; it was a sudden descent from the poetic to the prosaic. Still, perhaps in the picturesque past the belated traveller would not have fared so well, so comfortably, or so cleanly in his hostelry as did we in our nineteenth-century one, where we found welcome letters awaiting us from home that reached us by the grace of the modern iron horse! Speed is a blessing after all, though it is the parent of much ugliness!

CHAPTER XIII

The Fenland capital—Mother and daughter towns—"Boston stump"—One church built over another—The company at our inn—A desultory ramble—An ancient prison—The Pilgrim Fathers—The banks of the Witham—Hussey Tower—An English Arcadia—Kyme Castle—Benington—A country of many churches—Wrangle—In search of a ghost—A remote village—Gargoyles—The grotesque in art.

Boston, that proudly calls itself "the capital of Fenland," struck us as a quaint old town, prosperous and busy, but not restless, with somewhat of a Dutch look about it, yet, notwithstanding, intensely English. A dreamy place in spite of its prosperity, dreamy but not dull; quaint perhaps rather than picturesque—a delightful, unspoilt old-world town, with an indescribable flavour of the long-ago about it, a spot where the poetry of a past civilisation lingers yet; a commercial town that is not ugly!

St. Botolph's town, as our American cousins love to call it, is one of the shrines of the "Old Country," competing for first place with Stratford-on-Avon in the heart of the New England pilgrim, for is not storied Boston the mother of its modern namesake across the wide Atlantic? However, we know that "a prophet hath no honour in his own country," so whilst numberless American travellers have

expressed their delight at this old Lincolnshire town, and Longfellow and other American poets have sung its praises in verse, the average Englishman appears to regard it hardly at all, and scarcely ever to visit it except under compulsion, and has even sung its dispraises in doggerel thus :—

> Boston ! Boston !
> Thou hast naught to boast on
> But a grand sluice and a high steeple,
> A proud, conceited, ignorant people,
> And a coast where souls are lost on.

But the charm of Boston, as indeed that of most places, depends upon sentiment and seeing, whether you look upon it with poetic or prosaic eyes. A famous English engineer once told me that he considered a modern express locomotive a most beautiful thing, and it was so in his eyes! "Unless a thing be strong it cannot be beautiful," was his axiom. Weakness, or even the idea of weakness, was an abomination to him, so that the tumble-down cottage, with its uneven roof bent into graceful curves that an artist so delights in, was simple ugliness to him.

It was meet that here we should "take our ease" in an ancient hostelry, and that we should have our breakfast served in a pleasant low-ceilinged parlour, whose panelled walls had an aroma of other days and other ways about them, and suggested to our imaginative minds many a bit of unrecorded romance. With a romancer's license we pictured that old-fashioned chamber peopled by past-time travellers who had come by coach or had posted by private chaise, and mingled with these was a bluff ship

captain of the wild North Sea, all making merry over their glasses and jokes. The modern traveller in the modern hotel is alas! less sociable, and takes himself over seriously, and seldom even smiles. But happily there seems to be something about the old English inn that thaws the formality and taciturnity out of strangers. I think this must be due to the sense of homeliness and comfort that pervades it, with the delightful absence of all pretence and show.

From our inn we looked across the wide market square right on to the splendid and spacious church with its tall and graceful tower, a veritable triumph of the builder's craft. It chanced to be market-day, and so the large square was filled with stalls, and was chiefly in the possession of picturesquely-clad country folk displaying their goods,—fruits, flowers, vegetables, eggs, poultry, and the like, whilst the townsfolk gathered round to make their purchases, the transactions being carried on with much mutual bargaining and leisurely chattering; and the hum of many blended voices came upwafted to us, not as a disturbing noise, but with a slumberous sound as restful as the summer droning of innumerable bees. The ear may be trained to listen with pleasure, as well as the eye to discern with delight, and it is the peace-suggesting country sounds, the clean, fresh air laden with sweet odours from flower, field, and tree, as well as the vision, that cause a rural ramble to be so rewarding and so enjoyable. There must surely be something in the moist air of the Fenland that makes musical melody of noises; for we noticed

that even the clanging of bells, the shrill whistling of locomotives, and the metallic rush of trains seemed strangely and pleasantly mellowed there; moreover, the traffic on the stony streets of Boston appeared subdued, and had none of that nerve-irritating din that rises so often from the London thoroughfares.

It was a morning of sunshine and shower, an April day that had lost itself in September, and not readily shall I forget the shifting scene below with its moving mosaic of colour, nor the effect of the constantly changing light and shade on the stately church tower. Now it would be a deep purple-gray, dark almost to blackness as seen against a mass of white vapour, then suddenly it would be all lightened up to a pale orange tint against a sombre rain-cloud, its tracery and sculpturings outlined by the delicate shadows they cast, giving them a soft effect as of stone embroidery. A wonderfully effective and beautiful structure is this tower, and, in my opinion, after Salisbury's soaring spire, the most beautiful and graceful in England, which is saying much in a land where so many fine examples of ecclesiastical architecture abound. This splendid church of St. Botolph arose out of the piety and prosperity of a past generation. History has it that it was built over a small Norman church that formerly stood on the site, and that worship went on in the earlier structure during the time of building, and not until the new edifice was completed was the ancient one removed—a curious, and I should imagine a unique fact, that may account for the great height and size of the nave.

It being market-day, we sought the bar of our hotel for a while, in order to study any odd characters we might perchance find gathered there, and we discovered a curious mixture of agricultural and town folk, with a sprinkling of seafaring men. The talk was as varied as the company. During the general hum of conversation we could not help noticing how many expressions were used manifestly of nautical origin, though they were employed apparently wholly by landsmen in concerns having no connection with the sea or shipping. We jotted down some of these as follows, just as they came to us:—"He's been on the rocks so lately"; "he's in smooth water now"; "it's all plain sailing"; "it's not all above board"; "he had to take in sail"; "now stow that away"; "it took the wind out of his sails"; "any port in a storm, you know"—and others of a like nature. A civil engineer with whom we got into conversation here, and who we gleaned was employed on the Fen drainage, expressed his unstinted admiration for the old Roman embankment that still follows the contour of a goodly portion of the Lincolnshire coast, and was designed and constructed as a bulwark against the encroachments of the sea, a purpose it has admirably served. This embankment, he told us, was in the main as strong and serviceable, in spite of ages of neglect, as when first raised all those long and eventful centuries ago; and furthermore, he stated as his honest opinion that, in spite of all our boasted advantages and progress, we could not to-day construct such enduring work.

Wandering in a desultory fashion about the

rambling old town, we came across a quaint old half-timber building known as Shodfriars Hall, that, with its gable-ends facing the street and projecting upper stories, showed how picturesquely our ancestors built. How pleasantly such an arrangement of gables breaks the skyline and gives it an interest that is so sadly wanting in our modern towns! Then we chanced upon the old town hall with its ancient and historic prisons; these consist of iron cages ranged along one side of the gloomy interior, cages somewhat resembling those that the lions and tigers are accommodated with at the zoological gardens, but minus the light, sunshine, and fresh air that the latter possess. Here in these small cages, within the dark and dreary hall, some of the Pilgrim Fathers were confined, and most uncomfortable they must have been; but they were men with stout hearts and dauntless spirits—men who made history in spite of circumstance! The sailing of the little ship *Mayflower* from Boston, in 1620, with the Pilgrim Fathers on board was at the time a seemingly trivial event, yet it has left its mark in the annals of the world; and in new America of to-day to trace your descent to one of that little and humble band is to be more than lord, or duke, or king! Some there are who have made light of the episode of the sailing of those few brave men for an unknown world across the wide and stormy ocean solely because they would be free:—

> Thou who makest the tale thy mirth,
> Consider that strip of Christian earth
> On the desolate shore of a sailless sea
> Full of terror and mystery,

Half-redeemed from the evil hold
Of the wood so dreary, and dark, and old,
Which drank with its lips of leaves the dew
When Time was young and the world was new,
And wove its shadows with sun and moon,
Ere the stones of Cheops were square and hewn—
Think of the sea's dread monotone,
Of the mournful wail from the pinewood blown,
Of the strange, vast splendours that lit the North,
Of the troubled throes of the quaking earth,
And the dismal tales the Indians told.

Seated safely and comfortably in a cosy arm-chair, how easy it is to sneer!

Then wandering on we espied a charming specimen of old-world building in the shape of an ancient grammar school, beautified with the bloom of centuries, which was, we learnt by a Latin inscription thereon, built in the year 1567. This interesting and picturesque structure is approached from the road by a courtyard, the entrance to which is through a fine old wrought-iron gateway. Verily Boston is a town of memories; its buildings are histories, and oftentimes pictures!

Not far away, on the opposite side of the road, stands a comfortable-looking red-brick building of two stories in the so-called Queen Anne style. It is an unpretentious but home-like structure, noteworthy as being the birthplace of Jean Ingelow, the popular Lincolnshire poetess and novelist. Then to our right the houses ceased, and the slow-gliding and, let it be honestly confessed, muddy river Witham took their place. Here and there the stream was crossed by ferry-boats, to which you descend by

A BIT OF BOSTON.

wooden steps, and in which you are paddled over in that primitive but picturesque old-fashioned manner at the cost of a penny. Here also, by some timber landing-stages, were anchored sundry sea-beaten fishing smacks that, with their red-tanned sails and sun-browned sailors on board mending their nets, made a very effective picture, so effective that we needs must spend a good hour sketching and photographing them (an engraving of one of our sketches will be found herewith). Along the banks of this river the artist may find ample material—"good stuff," in painter's slang—for brush or pencil, and the amateur photographer a most profitable hunting-ground. Even the old warehouses on the opposite side of the river are paintable, being pleasing in outline and good in colour—a fact proving that commercial structures need not of necessity be ugly, though alas! they mostly are. Then rambling on in a delightfully aimless fashion, at the same time keeping our eyes well open for the picturesque, we chanced, in a field a little beyond the outskirts of the town, upon an old ruined red-brick tower, standing there alone in crumbling and pathetic solitude. We learnt that this was called Hussey Tower, and that it was erected by Lord Hussey about 1500, who was beheaded in the reign of Henry VIII. for being concerned in the Lincolnshire rebellion. So one drives about country and learns or re-learns history as the case may be.

We bade a reluctant good-bye to old-world and storied Boston one bright, breezy morning, and soon found ourselves once again in the open country, with

all Nature around us sunny and smiling. Boston was interesting, but the country was beautiful. The landscape had a delightfully fresh look after the frequent showers of the previous day; the moisture had brought out the colour and scent of everything. The air, wind-swept and rain-washed, was clear, and cool, and sweet, and simply to breathe it was a pleasure. As we journeyed on we rejoiced in the genial sunshine and the balmy breezes that tempered its warmth and gently rustled the leaves of the trees by the way, making a soft, subdued musical melody for us, not unlike the sound of a lazy summer sea toying with some sandy shore—breezes that, as they passed by, caused rhythmic waves to follow one another over the long grasses in the fields, and set the sails of the windmills near at hand and far away a-whirling round and round at a merry pace.

Everywhere we glanced was movement, in things inanimate as well as living; the birds, too, were in a lively mood, and much in welcome evidence (what would the country be without birds? those cheery companions of the lonely wanderer!). Even the fat rooks gave vent to their feelings of satisfaction by contented if clamorous cawing as they sailed by us in merry company overhead, for, be it noted, rooks can caw contentedly and discontentedly, and the two caws are very different. Rooks are knowing birds too, and they appear to possess a considerable amount of what we term instinct. We all know the old saying that rats desert an unseaworthy ship. Whether this be true or not I cannot tell, but I believe that rooks desert an unsafe tree. I lived

near a rookery once, and studied their ways and character. There were several nests in one big elm tree, a sturdy-looking tree, and apparently a favourite with the rooks. One year, for a purpose I could not divine, all the nests in this tree were deserted, and fresh ones built in another elm near by. Within a few months after its desertion by the rooks the former tree was blown down in an exceptionally heavy gale, though, till the gale came, it had shown no signs of weakness. Other big trees in the same wood were laid low at the same time, but not one of those that the rooks inhabited was damaged even in branch.

The weather was simply perfect, the sky overhead was as blue as a June sea; it was a joy to be in the country on such a day, when earth seemed a veritable Paradise, and pain and death a bad dream. There is a virtue at times in the art of forgetting! for, when the world looks so fair, one desires to be immortal! "Around God's throne," writes Olive Schreiner, "there may be choirs and companies of angels, cherubim and seraphim rising tier above tier, but not for one of them all does the soul cry aloud. Only, perhaps, for a little human woman full of sin that it once loved." So there may be golden cities in Paradise paved with priceless gems, yet not for these does my soul hunger, but for the restful green fields and the pastoral peacefulness of our English Arcadia, with its musical melody of wandering streams and sense of untold repose. Did not Mr. Andrew Carnegie, the American millionaire, who once drove through the heart of England from

Brighton to Inverness, on arriving at the latter town, send a telegram to a friend, saying, "We arrived at the end of *Paradise* this evening"? There is something very lovable about the English landscape; where grander scenes excite your admiration, it wins your affections, and will not let them go again, it nestles so near your heart. I have beheld the finest scenery the earth has to show, oftentimes with almost awe-struck admiration, but only the peace-bestowing English scenery have I ever felt to love!

About two miles on our way, and a little to the right of our road, we observed Kyme's ancient tower uprising amidst surrounding foliage; this picturesque relic of past days gave a special interest and character to the prospect with its flavour of old-world romance. The solitary tower is all that remains of the once stately abode of the Kymes; it is now incorporated with a homely farmstead, and tells its own story of fallen fortunes.

Driving on we soon reached a wide dyke, which we crossed on an ancient bridge; here a lonely wayside inn proclaimed itself on its sign with the comprehensive title of "The Angler's, Cyclist's, and Traveller's Rest." The dyke struck us, even on that bright sunshiny day, as being a dark and dreary stretch of water of a cheerless leaden hue, embanked and treeless. But the sullen waters of the dyke only acted as a foil to enhance the bright beauty of the sun-suffused landscape all around, as the shadow gives value to the light, and too much beauty is apt to cloy. A picture may be too pretty. Said an art

critic once to Turner, "That's a fine painting of yours, but why have you got that ugly bit of building in the corner?" "Oh!" replied Turner, "that's to give value to the rest of the composition by way of contrast; I made it ugly on purpose!" and Turner was right. Who enjoys the country so much as the dweller in the unbeautiful smoke-stained streets of our huge modern towns?

Shortly after this we reached the little village of Benington, which boasted a large church having a fine old tower, a tower, however, that ended abruptly without any architectural finish; presumably the ambition of the early builders was greater than their means. Nowadays we have improved upon the old ways—we build and complete without the means, then we set to work to beg for the money, though the begging is not always successful, as the following characteristic letter of Mr. Ruskin shows, which he wrote in reply to a circular asking him to subscribe to help to pay off some of the debt on a certain iron church:—

BRANTWOOD, CONISTON, LANCASHIRE,
19*th May* 1886.

SIR—I am scornfully amused at your appeal to me, of all people in the world the precisely least likely to give you a farthing! My first word to all men and boys who care to hear me is—Don't get into debt. Starve and go to heaven, but don't borrow. . . . Don't buy things you can't pay for! And of all manner of debtors, pious people building churches they can't pay for are the most detestable nonsense to me. Can't you preach and pray behind the hedges, or in a sandpit, or in a coalhole first? And of all manner of churches thus idiotically built, iron churches are the damnablest to me. . . . Ever, nevertheless, and in all this saying, your faithful servant,

JOHN RUSKIN.

Dear me, and when I think of it, how often am I not asked to subscribe to help to pay off debts on churches, mostly, if not all, built by contract, and adorned with bright brass fittings from Birmingham!

The ancient church at Benington, time-worn and gray, looked interesting, and the interior would probably have repaid inspection, but the day was so gloriously fine that our love of the open air and cheerful sunshine quite overpowered our antiquarian tastes that sunny morning. Moreover, we did not set out to see everything on our way unless inclined so to do; ours was purely a pleasure tour, the mood of the moment was alone our guide. By the side of the churchyard we noticed a square space enclosed by a wall; we imagined that this must have been an old cattle-pound, but when we passed by it was full of all kinds of rubbish, as though it were the village dustbin.

Our road now wound through a very pleasant country, past busy windmills, sleepy farmsteads, and pretty cottages, till we came to the hamlet of Leake, where we observed another very fine church, of a size apparently out of all proportion to the needs of the parish. It may often be noted in Lincolnshire and the eastern counties generally how fine many of the remote country churches are, and how often, alas! such fine architectural monuments are in bad repair for want of sufficient funds to properly maintain them, the surrounding population being purely agricultural and poor; it is difficult to imagine that the population could ever have been much greater, though it may have been wealthier. The question

arises, How came these grand and large churches to be built, without any probability of their having a congregation at all commensurate with their size?

The country became now more open, and our road wound in and out of the level meadows like the letter S, or rather like a succession of such letters, thereby almost doubling the distance from point to point taken in a straight line. We could only presume that the modern road followed the uncertain route of the original bridle-path, which doubtless wound in and out in this provokingly tortuous manner to avoid bad ground and marshy spots. Were Lincolnshire a county in one of the United States, I "guess" that this road would long ago have been made unpicturesquely straight and convenient,—the practical American considers it a wicked waste of energy to go two miles in place of one. His idea of road-making resembles that of the ancient Romans in so far as the idea of both is to take the nearest line between two places. "That's the best road," exclaimed a prominent Yankee engineer, "that goes the most direct between two places; beauty is a matter of seeing and sentiment, and to me a straight line is a beautiful thing, because it best fulfils its purpose." So speaks the engineer. Both Nature and the artist, as a rule, abhor straight lines.

The next village on our road was Wrangle; since we had left Boston we had hardly been out of sight of a village or a church, but though the villages were numerous they were small. Here at Wrangle again we found a tiny collection of houses,

out of which rose another fine and beautiful church, the stones of which had taken upon themselves a lovely soft gray with age. I think there is no country in the world where Time tones and tints the stones of buildings so pleasantly as it does in England. The people in this part of Lincolnshire should be good, if an ample supply of fine churches makes for goodness. Still one can never be certain of anything in this uncertain world, for does not the poet declare that—

> Wherever God erects a house of prayer,
> The Devil always builds a chapel there:
> And 'twill be found upon examination,
> The latter has the largest congregation.

We had been informed by a Lincolnshire antiquary, whom by chance we had become acquainted with during the journey, that the rectory at Wrangle was haunted by a ghost in the shape of a green lady, and that this ghost had upon one occasion left behind her a memento of one of her nocturnal visitations, in the shape of a peculiar ring—surely a singular, if not a very irregular thing, for a spirit to do. Moreover, the enthusiastic and good-natured antiquary most kindly gave us his card to be used as an introduction to the rector, who he said would gladly give us all particulars. The story interested us, and the opportunity that fortune had placed in our way of paying a visit to a haunted house was too attractive to be missed. So, bearing this story in mind, and finding ourselves in Wrangle, we forthwith drove straight up to the rectory, an old-fashioned

building that had an ancient look, though perhaps not exactly one's ideal of a haunted house—still it would do. Having introduced ourselves to the rector, and having explained the purport of our visit, just when our expectations were raised to the utmost pitch, we received a dire disappointment, for the rector, with a smile, informed us that he had only recently come there and, so far, he had never seen the ghost, or been troubled by it in any way. He had a dim sort of a recollection that he had heard something about it from some one, and he would be glad to learn further particulars. He did not even know which the haunted room was, or whether it was the whole house that was supposed to be haunted and not a particular chamber. "I am afraid," he said, "your introduction must have been intended for my predecessor, who possibly was well posted up in the matter." Certainly our introduction was of a very informal nature, our antiquarian friend had simply written on the back of his card, "Call on the rector of Wrangle, make use of my card, and he will tell you all about the ghost." Truly we felt just a trifle disappointed. We had been on the trail of a ghost so often, yet had never been able to run one to earth, and again it had eluded us! Possibly the rector divined our feelings, for he cheerily exclaimed, "Well, I am sorry I cannot show you what you want, but I can show you a very interesting church." Now we had not come to Wrangle to see a church, but a haunted house, and a material ring left by an immaterial spirit, and we felt somehow, if unreasonably, aggrieved at not finding these.

The church was truly interesting, though I fear we were hardly in the mood to properly appreciate it. The rector pointed out to us in the east window some old stained glass that had been reset in fragments there, which he declared to be the finest old stained glass in Lincolnshire; then he led us to the south porch, where he pointed out to us the quaint and beautiful external carvings round the Early English south doorway, which we observed was curiously trefoiled and decorated with dog-tooth mouldings. It is a specimen of carving that any church might be proud to possess; here, little seen and possibly never admired except by chance comers like ourselves, it is wasting its beauty in the wilderness, for the doorway is simply the entrance to the graveyard and appears not to be much, if at all used, the congregation entering the church by the north porch. On the north wall we observed a fine, not to say ostentatious, altar-tomb to Sir John Read and his lady dated 1626. This takes up, profitably or unprofitably, a good deal of room. Below on a verse we read the following tribute to the underlying dead :—

> Whom love did linke and nought but death did dessever,
> Well may they be conioind and ly together,
> Like turtle doves they livd Chaste pure in mind,
> Fewe, O, too few such couples we shall find.

You have to get used to the archaic spelling of some of these old tombstone inscriptions, but this one is comparatively clear. Our ancestors evidently did not set much score on spelling, for on a stately

seventeenth-century monument I have actually noticed the same word spelt in three different ways. Above Sir John Read's fine altar-tomb is suspended a helmet with a crest coloured proper, only the helmet is not a genuine one, being of plaster! and the plaster has got cracked, and therefore the sham is revealed to the least observant; so the whole thing looks ridiculous! Possibly, however, this was merely intended for a temporary funeral helmet, and would have been removed in due course but had been forgotten.

In the pavement we noticed a slab containing an interesting brass dated 1503, to "Iohn Reed marchant of ye stapell of Calys, and Margaret his wyfe." Their eight sons and five daughters are also shown upon it. Round this slab run portions of an inscription in old English. It is unfortunate that this is incomplete, for it appears to be quaint.

On leaving the church we observed with pleasure that the ancient and curious gargoyles that project from its roof still serve the purpose for which they were originally constructed, and have not been improved away, or suffered the common indignity of being converted into rain-water heads. Who invented the gargoyle, I wonder? A monk, I'll wager, if I have read past ecclesiastical architecture aright. And all lovers of the quaintly decorative are under great obligations to the unknown monk, for gargoyles offered an irresistible opportunity for the medieval craftsman to outwardly express his inmost fancies and the artistic spirit that consumed his soul, and must somehow be visibly revealed. He was

jocular at times, even to the verge of profanity. Possibly because gargoyles were outside the sacred edifice, he felt more at liberty to do as he would, so he created wonderful monsters, grinning good-natured-looking demons in place of saints; demons that seemed verily to exist and breathe and struggle in stone; his subtle art contrived to make even the hideous delightful and to be desired. So great was his genius, so cunning his chisel that when I look upon his handiwork, oftentimes I gaze with astonished admiration at his rare skill and inventive faculties, and I sadly wonder whether we shall ever look upon his like again. His art was the outcome of love. Our modern art seems of unhappy necessity imbued with the commercial spirit of the age. Men now paint and sculpture to live, the medieval art craftsman lived to work; the one labours to live, the other loved to labour. The highest art, the worthiest work, cannot be produced for gold, it comes alone from love, love that is unembarrassed with the thought of having to provide the necessaries of life. Where anxiety steps in, art suffers, then withers—and dies! Some years ago I was showing a now popular artist an old picture by Francesco Francia on panel that I possess, and asked him how it was, apart from the almost painful truthfulness of the drawing, that the colours had remained so fresh and pure in tint, after all the years it had existed, whilst so many modern pictures lose so much of their first brilliancy in comparatively so short a time. He replied, after examining the picture, that it had been painted, then smoothed down, and re-painted many

times, each after an interval to allow the pigments to dry hard, and that it had taken years in place of months to complete. "Now were I to paint like that I should simply starve, and possibly be called a fool for my pains—and man must live, you know, to say nothing of rent, rates, and taxes. When I began life I was young and enthusiastic, and, as you know, painted in a garret for love and possible fame which came too tardily" (I have a painting the artist did in those happy early days, pronounced by competent critics to be worthy of a great master); "but love did not butter my bread nor provide me with a decent home, so at last I was compelled to paint for popularity and profit. Now I possess a fine studio and fashionable patrons, whose portraits I paint without pleasure but I live at ease—yet sometimes I sigh for those old times when things were otherwise."

CHAPTER XIV

Wind-blown trees — Marshlands — September weather — Wainfleet — An ancient school — The scent of the sea — The rehabilitation of the old-fashioned ghost — A Lincolnshire mystery — A vain search — Too much alike — Delightfully indefinite — Halton Holgate — In quest of a haunted house.

Leaving Wrangle, the country to our right became still more open; for the rest of our way we followed the changeful line of the sea-coast at a distance of about a mile or more inland. The wind, coming unrestrained from the seaward over the flat marsh-like meadow lands, bore to us the unmistakable flavour of the "briny," its bracing and refreshing salt breath, cool and tonic-laden, was very grateful to our lungs after the soft, soothing country airs that we had been so long accustomed to. The trees here, what few trees there existed that is, were stunted, tortured, and wind-blown to one side; but strangely enough, not as is usually the case, bent inward from the sea but towards it, plainly proving that the strong gales and prevailing winds in this quarter are from the land side, thus reversing the general order of things on our coasts.

Another notable feature of our road—in marked contrast with the early portion of our stage out from Boston—was the fact that for the next nine miles or

so on to our night's destination at Wainfleet we passed no villages and saw no churches. It was a lonely stretch of road ; for company we had, besides the stunted trees, only the wide earth and open sky ; but such loneliness has its charms to the vigorous mind, it was all so suggestive of space and freedom, begetful of broad thinking and expanded views. To look upon Nature thus is to make one realise the littleness of the minor worries of life. The mind is too apt to get cramped at times by cramped surroundings, the vision impresses the brain more than most people are aware. The wild, far-reaching marshlands to our right had a peculiarly plaintive look. Across them the mighty gleams of golden sunlight swept in utter silence, succeeded by vast purple-gray shadows blown out into the eternity of blue beyond : movement of mighty masses but no sound, yet one is so accustomed in this world to associate movement with sound that the ear waits for the latter as something that should follow though it comes not. The prospect was to a certain extent desolate, yet not dreary ; the golden green of the long autumn grasses tossing in the wind, the many bright-hued marsh-flowers made the wild waste look almost gay, so splashed with colour was it over all ! The vast level landscape stretching away and away to the vague far-off horizon that seemed to fade there into a mystic nothingness—neither earth, nor sea, nor sky—excited within us a sentiment of vastness that words are inadequate to convey, a sentiment very real yet impossible wholly to analyse. One cannot describe the indescribable, and of such moods of the mind one

feels the truth of the poet's dictum that "What's worth the saying can't be said."

Nature here wore an unfamiliar aspect to us; the wide marshland was beautiful, but beautiful with a strange and novel beauty. Now and then were infrequent sign-posts, old and leaning, each with one solitary arm pointing eastward, laconically inscribed "To the Sea," not to any house or hamlet be it noticed. They might as well have been inscribed, it seemed to us in our philosophy, "To the World's end!" Here the black sleek rooks and restless white-winged gulls appeared to possess a common meeting ground; the rooks for a wonder were quiet, being silently busy, presumably intent after worms; not so the gulls, for ever and again some of them would rise and whirl round and round, restlessly uttering peevish cries the while. Neither the cry of gull nor caw of rook are musical; in truth, they are grating and harsh, yet they are suggestive of the open air, and are, therefore, pleasing to the ear of the town-dweller, and lull him to rest in spite of their discordance with a sense of deep refreshment.

Shakespeare sings of "the uncertain glory of an April day." He might, even with greater truth, have written September in place of April; for in the former month the weather is just as changeful, and the skies are finer with more vigorous cloud-scapes; then, too, the fields and foliage "have put their glory on," and at times under a sudden sun-burst, especially in the clear air that comes after rain, the many-tinted woods become a miracle of colour such that the painter with the richest palette cannot realise. We

were reminded of "the uncertain glory of a *September* day" by a sudden, wholly unexpected, and unwelcome change that had taken place in the weather. In front of us were gradually gathering great banks of sombre clouds that might mean rain; the wind as suddenly had lost its gentleness and blew wild and fitfully, but still the sun was shining brightly all around, converting the winding water-ways and reed-encircled pools of the marshlands into glowing gold. The strong effect of the sunlight on the landscape contrasting with the low-toned gray sky ahead was most striking. But the outlook suggested to us that it would be wiser to hasten on than to loiter about admiring the prospect, for it was a shelterless region. So we sped along to the merry music of the jingling harness, and the measured clatter of our horses' hoofs on the hard roadway, rounding the many corners with a warning note from the horn, and a pleasant swing of the dog-cart that showed the pace we were going.

A low, gray sky, a freshing wind,
A cold scent of the misty sea
Before, the barren dunes; behind,
The level meadows far and free.

The approach to Wainfleet was very pretty; just before the town a welcome wood came into sight, then a stream of clear running water crossed by a foot-bridge, next a tall windmill which we passed close by, so close that we could hear the swish, swish, swish of its great sails as they went hurtling round and round in mighty sweeps; at that moment the rain came down, and, though we reached our inn directly after-

wards we managed to get pretty wet outwardly during the few minutes' interval. However, the good-hearted landlady greeted her dripping guests with a ready smile, and ushered us into a tiny, cosy sitting-room, wherein she soon had a wood fire blazing a cheery and ruddy welcome, "just to warm us up a bit." Thoughtful and kindly landlady, may you prosper and live long to welcome hosts of other travellers! Then "to keep out the cold" (we had no fear of cold, but no matter), a hot cup of tea with *cream*, rich country cream and buttered toast, made its unexpected but not unwelcome appearance, so though our hostel was small and primitive in keeping with the town, we felt that we might have fared much worse in far more pretentious quarters. Looking round our chamber we observed that the door opened with a latch instead of a handle, a trifle that somehow pleased us, one so seldom comes upon that kind of fastening nowadays, even in remote country places.

Soon the storm cleared away, and the sun shone forth quite cheerily again, and though now low in the yellowing western sky, still it shone brilliantly enough to entice us out of doors. We discovered Wainfleet to be a sleepy little market-town, and a decayed seaport—a town with some quaint buildings of past days, not exactly a picturesque place but certainly an interesting one. Wainfleet is a spot where the hand of Time seems not only to be stayed but put back long years; it should be dear to the heart of an antiquary, for it looks so genuinely ancient, so far removed from the modern world and

all its rush, bustle, and advantages! It is a spot that might be called intolerably dull, or intensely restful, according to the mind and mood of man. We deemed it the latter, but then we only stopped there a few waking hours (one cannot count the time one sleeps); had we remained longer perhaps we might have thought differently!

First we made our way to the market square, which, by the way, we had all to ourselves, except for a sleeping dog. In the centre of the square stands the tall and weather-stained shaft of an ancient cross, elevated on a basement of four steps. The top of the shaft is now surmounted by a stone ball in place of the cross of old. This is capped by a well-designed weather-vane; so this ancient structure, raised by religious enthusiasm, and partially destroyed by religious reforming—deforming, some people will have it—zeal, now serves a useful and picturesque purpose, and could hardly be objected to by the sternest Puritan.

Then, wandering about, we espied a fine old brick building of two stories, the front being flanked by octagonal towers, a building not unlike Eton College Chapel on a smaller scale. This proved to be Magdalen School, founded in the fifteenth century by the famous William de Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester, 1459, who was born in the town and who also founded Magdalen College, Oxford, which little history we picked up accidentally that evening in an odd copy of a Lincolnshire Directory we discovered at our hotel. We did not hunt it up of set purpose. I mention this, not wishing to be considered didactic.

The building, after all the years bygone, still serves its ancient purpose, more fortunate than many other foundations in this respect whose funds have been diverted to different aims from those originally intended, sometimes perhaps of necessity, but other times, and not seldom, I fear, without such compulsory or sufficient cause. We were told that the top story of this very interesting bit of old-time architecture was the school, and the ground floor the master's house, a curious arrangement. "Just you ring the bell at the door," exclaimed our informant, "and I'm sure the master will show you over; it's a funny old place within." But we did not like to intrude; moreover, it was getting late and the gloaming was gathering around.

Resuming our wanderings we found ourselves eventually by the side of the narrow river Steeping, up which the small ships of yore used to make their way to the then flourishing port of Wainfleet, or Waynflete as the ancient geographers quaintly had it. There we rested that warm September evening watching, in a dreamy mood, the tranquil gliding and gleaming of the peaceful river, listening to the soothing, liquid gurgling of its quiet flowing water. There was something very poetic about the spot that caused us to weave romances for ourselves, a change from reading them ready-made in novels! So we rested and romanced

> While the stars came out and the night wind
> Brought up the stream
> Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.

We had so far been disappointed in our search

after a haunted house this journey, but, nothing daunted, the following morning we set forth on the same errand, having heard that there was "a real haunted house" at Halton Holgate, a village situated about eight miles from Wainfleet. Haunted houses are strangely coming into note and repute again; I really thought their day was over for ever, but it seems not so. The good old-fashioned ghost that roams about corridors, and stalks in ancient chambers till cock-crowing time; the ghost of our ancestors and the early numbers of the Christmas illustrated papers; the ghost that groans in a ghastly manner, and makes weird "unearthly" noises in the middle of the night, appears once more much in evidence,—I had nearly said "had come to life again"! He is even written about seriously and complainingly to the papers! In a long letter to the *Standard* that appeared therein on 22nd April 1896 under the heading of "A Haunted House," the writer gravely laments his lot in having unwittingly taken a lease of a house from which he and his family were driven, solely on account of the ghostly manifestations that took place there! The letter, which I afterwards learnt was written in absolutely good faith and was no hoax, commences: "In the nineteenth century ghosts are obsolete, but they are costing me two hundred pounds a year. I have written to my lawyer, but am told by him that the English law does not recognise ghosts!" The reading of this caused me to open my eyes in wonderment, the assertions were simply astonishing. Still the law seemed sensible; if any man were

allowed to throw up an inconvenient lease on the plea of ghosts where should we be? The writer of the letter, it appears, was an officer in the English army. "Some time ago," he proceeds, "I left India on furlough, and, being near the end of my service, looked out for a house that should be our home for a few years. . . . I may say that I am not physically nervous. I have been under fire repeatedly, have been badly wounded in action, and have been complimented on my coolness when bullets were flying about. I was not then afraid of ghosts as far as I knew. I had often been in places where my revolver had to be ready to my hand. . . . As winter drew on and the nights began to lengthen, strange noises began to be heard. . . . The governess used to complain of a tall lady, with black heavy eyebrows, who used to come as if to strangle her as she lay in bed. She also described some footsteps, which had passed along the corridor by her door, of some one apparently intoxicated. But in fact no one had left their rooms, and no one had been intoxicated. One night the housemaid, according to her account, was terrified by a tall lady with heavy dark eyebrows, who entered the room and bent over her bed. Another night we had driven into the town to a concert. It was nearly midnight when we returned. Our old Scotch housekeeper, who admitted us, a woman of iron nerves, was trembling with terror. Shortly before our arrival a horrible shriek had rung through the house. To all our questions she only replied, "It was nothing earthly." The nurse, who was awake

with a child with whooping-cough, heard the cry, and says it was simply horrible. One night, lying awake, I distinctly saw the handle of my bedroom door turned, and the door pushed open. I seized my revolver, and ran to the door. The lamp in the long corridor was burning brightly, no one was there, and no one could have got away. Now I can honestly say there is nothing against the house but ghosts. It is a roomy, nice, dry house. There are no ghosts. Are there not?" This is truly astonishing reading considering, as I have already stated, that I know the communication was made in perfectly good faith. A brave soldier to be driven out of a very comfortable and suitable home by a ghost—for thus the story ended!

For curiosity I cut out this letter and pasted it in my Commonplace Book. The subject had almost slipped my memory, when, just before starting on our present tour, I read in the *Standard* of 30th August 1897 of another haunted house in Lincolnshire. The account was long and circumstantial; having perused it carefully I took note of all particulars, determining to visit the house, if possible, and to see if by any means one could elucidate the mystery. As it may interest my readers, I venture here to quote the article *in extenso;* the more am I induced to do this as it happened we did manage to inspect the house at our leisure, and had besides a long conversation with Mrs. Wilson, who claims to have actually seen the ghost! But I am getting previous. It will be noted that the account is of some length, and that

the story was not dismissed by the editor of the *Standard* in a mere paragraph. This then it is :—

From Halton Holgate, a village near Spilsby, Lincolnshire, comes a story which is causing some sensation among the country folk in the neighbourhood. For some time rumours of human bones having been discovered under a brick floor of a farm, near the village, of strange tappings having been heard, and of a ghost having been seen, have been afloat, and it was with the intention of trying to sift the mystery that a Lincoln reporter has just visited the scene. The farmstead where the sounds are said to have been heard, and the ghost seen, stands some distance back from the high road, and is occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Wilson and their servant man. On being interviewed Mrs. Wilson was at first reluctant to make any statement, but eventually she narrated the following story :—

"We came here on Lady-day. The first night or so we heard very strange noises about midnight, as though some one was knocking at the doors and walls. Once it seemed as though some one was moving all the things about in a hurry downstairs. Another time the noise was like a heavy picture falling from the wall ; but in the morning I found everything as right as it was the night before. The servant man left, saying he dared not stop, and we had to get another. Then about six weeks ago, I saw 'something.' Before getting into bed, my husband having retired before me, I thought I would go downstairs and see if the cow was all right, as it was about to calve. I did so, and when at the foot of the stairs, just as I was about to go up again, I saw an old man standing at the top and looking at me. He was standing as though he was very round-shouldered. How I got past I cannot say, but as soon as I did so I darted into the bedroom and slammed the door. Then I went to get some water from the dressing-table, but 'feeling' that some one was behind me I turned round sharply, and there again stood the same old man. He quickly vanished, but I am quite certain I saw him. I have also seen him several times since, though not quite so distinctly."

Mrs. Wilson conducted her interviewer to the sitting-room

where the figure appeared. The floor in one corner was very uneven, and a day or two ago Mrs. Wilson took up the bricks, with the intention of relaying them. When she had taken them up she perceived a disagreeable smell. Her suspicions being aroused, she called her husband, and the two commenced a minute examination. With a stick three or four bones were soon turned over, together with a gold ring and several pieces of old black silk. All these had evidently been buried in quicklime, the bones and silk having obviously been burned therewith. The search after this was not further prosecuted, but a quantity of sand introduced and the floor levelled again. Dr. Gay, to whom the bones were submitted, stated that they were undoubtedly human, but he believed them to be nearly one hundred years old.

Now it happened, whilst we were at Boston, that we purchased a copy of the *Standard* of 13th September 1897. On glancing over this our eyes caught sight of the following further and later particulars of this haunted dwelling, now exalted into "The Lincolnshire Ghost Mystery." The account brought up to date ran thus :—

A Lincoln Correspondent writes: "Despite all efforts, the Lincolnshire ghost mystery still remains unravelled. That the noises nightly heard cannot be ascribed to rats has been amply demonstrated, and other suggestions when acted upon likewise fail to elucidate the matter. All over the country the affair has excited the greatest interest, and two London gentlemen have written asking for permission to stay a night in the house. Other letters have been received from 'clairvoyants' asking for pieces of the silk or one of the bones discovered under the floor, whilst a London clergyman has written advising Mrs. Wilson to bury the bones in consecrated ground, then, he says, 'the ghostly visitor will trouble you no longer." The owner of the house in question —a farmstead at Halton Holgate, near Spilsby—has tried to throw discredit on the whole affair, but such efforts have failed, and it now transpires that the house was known to be haunted fully thirty years ago."

The mystery had quite a promising look; and, coming across this second account of it just as we were approaching the neighbourhood of the scene of ghostly doings, raised our curiosity still more, and increased our determination not to miss this rare opportunity of inspecting a genuine (?) haunted house. See it somehow we must! Now it occurred to us that, as Halton Holgate was within easy distance of Wainfleet, our landlord would surely know something about the story and the people, and that he might enlighten us about sundry details. So in the morning, before starting, we interviewed him in his snug bar, and having shown him the cuttings from the *Standard* that we had brought with us, awaited his comments. "Oh yes," he began, "I've heard the story, but do not put much account on it myself, nor do I believe any one else about here does. I think the London papers put more store on it than we do. They say noises have been heard in the house at night. Well, you see, sir, the house stands on the top of a hill, and is very exposed to the wind. I've been told that there is a small trap-door in the roof at the top of the staircase, which is, or was, quite loose, and at the foot of the staircase is the front door, and they say that when the wind blows at all strong it gets under the door and lifts the trap up and down, and this accounts for the noises, perhaps there may be rats as well. I fancy the noises frightened the woman when she first went into the house, and she imagined the rest. At least that's my view of the matter from all I've heard." Manifestly the landlord was unbelieving; truly we

too were sceptical, but even so, we thought the landlord's explanation of the nightly noises rather weak, notwithstanding his further remark that he thought the woman was very nervous, and the house being in a lonely situation made her the more so when she was left in it by herself at times, as she frequently was on their first coming there. "But that hardly accounts for her *seeing* the ghost," we exclaimed. "Oh! well, I just put that down to nerves; I expect she got frightened when she went there at first, and, as I've said, imagined the rest. I don't believe in ghosts seen by other people." "And what about the human bones?" we queried. "Well, as to the bones, they say as how when the house was built some soil was taken from the churchyard to fill up the foundations, and that fact would account for the finding of them."

It certainly seemed to us that the landlord's theory and explanations rather added to the mystery than helped to clear it up in any way; his reasonings were hardly convincing. We noted one thing in the landlord's arguments that appeared to us almost as improbable as the ghost story, namely, the way he so readily accounted for the existence of human bones under the floor by the removal of soil from the churchyard, the latter we afterwards discovered being about a mile away from the place; and even allowing such a thing to be permitted at the time of the building of the house—perhaps, by rough guess, some fifty years ago—such a proceeding was most unlikely, as soil could be had close at hand for the digging.

We felt that now we must wait till we got to Halton Holgate for further details. We had an introduction to the rector of the parish there, and we looked forward to hearing his views on the matter, for surely he of all people, we reasoned, would be in a position to help us to unravel the mystery. Matters were getting interesting; at last it seemed, after long years of search, that we should be able to run a real "haunted" house to earth; and we determined, if by any means we could arrange to do so, that we would spend a night therein. It would be a novel experience; indeed we felt quite mildly excited at the prospect. Failing this, it would be something if we could converse with a person who declared that she had seen an actual ghost, and who would describe to us what it was like, how it behaved itself, and so forth! We had come across plenty of people in the world, from time to time, who declared to us that they once knew somebody who said that they had seen a ghost, but we could never discover the actual party; for some cause or another he or she was never get-at-able, and I prefer my facts—or fiction—first hand. Stories, like wine, have a wonderful way of improving with age; indeed I think that most stories improve far more rapidly than wine. I once traced a curious three-year-old story back home to the place of its birth, and the original teller did not even recognise his offspring in its altered and improved garb! Tradition is like ivy; give it time and it will completely disguise the original structure.

The weather being fine and having finished our interview with our landlord, we started off without further delay, anxious to have as much time as possible before us for our day's explorations. The country still continued level, the road winding in and out thereof, as though determined to cover twice as much ground as needful in getting from place to place. Just beyond Wainfleet we passed, close to our way, the tallest windmill I think I have ever seen; it looked more like a lighthouse with sails attached than a proper windmill; it was presumably so built to obtain all the breezes possible, as in a flat country the foliage of the growing trees around is apt to deprive a mill of much of its motive power. In fact an Essex miller once told me that owing to the growth of the trees around his mill since it was first built, he could hardly ever work it in the summer time on account of the foliage robbing him of so much wind. Then as we drove on we caught a peep of low wooded hills ahead, showing an uneven outline, faintly blue, with touches of orange here and there where the sun's rays rested on the golden autumn leafage, now lighting up one spot, now another. We were delighted to observe that our road led apparently in the direction of these hills, for they gave promise of pleasant wanderings.

Farther on we reached a pretty little village, with its church picturesquely crowning a knoll. Here we pulled up for a moment to ask the name of the place from a man at work by the roadside. "This be I-r-b-y," he responded, spelling not pro-

nouncing the name, somewhat to our surprise; so we asked him why he did so. "Well, sir, you see there be another village not far off called Orby, only it begins with a 'O' and ours begins with a 'I,' and the names do sound so alike when you speaks them, that we generally spells them to strangers to make sure. Often folk comes here who wants to go to Orby, and often folk who wants to come here gets directed to Orby. One of the names ought to be changed, it would save a lot of trouble and loss of temper." Then we asked him how far it was to Halton Holgate, and he said he thought it was about three miles, but he was not quite sure, not being a good judge of distances; "it might be more or it might be less," which was rather vague. Indeed we noticed generally in Lincolnshire how hard it was to obtain a precise reply to any query as to distance. Here is a sample of a few of the delightfully indefinite answers made to us from time to time when seeking information on this point. "Oh! not very far." "Some goodish bit on yet." "Just a little farther on." "A longish way off." "A few miles more." To the last reply a further query as to how many miles only brought the inconclusive response, "Oh! not many."

In due time we bade good-bye to the level country, for our road now led us up quite a respectable hill and through a rock cutting that was spanned at one point by a rustic bridge. It was a treat to see the great gray strong rocks after our long wandering in Fenland. The character of the

AN OLD-TIME FARMSTEAD.

scenery was entirely changed, we had touched the fringe of the Wold region, the highlands of Lincolnshire—"Wide, wild, and open to the air." At the top of the hill we arrived at a scattered little village, and this proved to be Halton Holgate. The church stood on one side of the road, the rectory on the other; to the latter we at once made our way, trusting to learn something authoritative about the haunted house from the rector, and hoping that perhaps we might obtain an introduction to the tenant through him. Unfortunately the rector was out, and not expected back till the evening. This was disappointing. The only thing to do now was to find our way to the house, and trust to our usual good fortune to obtain admission and an interview with the farmer's wife.

We accosted the first native we met. Of him we boldly asked our way to the "haunted house," for we did not even know the name of it. But our query was sufficient, evidently the humble homestead had become famous, and had well established its reputation. We were directed to a footpath which we were told to follow across some fields, "it will take you right there." Then we ventured to ask the native if he had heard much about the ghost. He replied laconically, "Rather." Did he believe in it? "Rather" again. We were not gaining much by our queries, the native did not appear to be of a communicative nature, and our attempts to draw him out were not very successful. To a further question if many people came to see the house, we received the same reply. Mani-

festly for some reason the native was disinclined to discuss the subject. This rather perplexed us, for on such matters the country folk, as a rule, love to talk and enlarge. As he left us, however, he made the somewhat enigmatical remark, "I wish as how we'd got a ghost at our house." Was he envious of his neighbour's fame? we wondered, or what did he mean? Could he possibly deem that a ghost was a profitable appendage to a house on the show principle, insomuch as it brought many people to see it? Or were his remarks intended to be sarcastic?

Having proceeded some way along the footpath we met a clergyman coming along. We at once jumped to the conclusion that he must be the rector, so we forthwith addressed him as such; but he smilingly replied, "No, I'm the Catholic priest," and a very pleasant-looking priest he was, not to say jovial. We felt we must have our little joke with him, so exclaimed, "Well, never mind, you'll do just as well. We're ghost-hunting. We've heard that there's a genuine haunted house hereabouts, an accredited article, not a fraud. We first read about it in the *Standard*, and have come to inspect it. Now, can you give us any information on the point? Have you by any chance been called in to lay the ghost with candle, bell, and book? But perhaps it is a Protestant ghost beyond Catholic control?" Just when we should have been serious we felt in a bantering mood. Why, I hardly know, but smile on the world and it smiles back at you. Now the priest had smiled on us, and we retaliated.

Had he been austere, probably we should have been grave. Just then this ghost-hunting expedition struck us as being intensely comical. The priest smiled again, we smiled our best in reply. We intuitively felt that his smile was a smile of unbelief—in the ghost, I mean. "Well, I'm afraid," he replied, "the worthy body is of a romantic temperament. I understand that the bones are not human bones after all, but belonged to a deceased pig. You know in the off-season gigantic gooseberries, sea-serpents, and ghosts flourish in the papers. You cannot possibly miss the house. When you come to the end of the next field, you will see it straight before you," and so we parted. Somehow the priest's remarks damped our ardour; either he did not or would not take the ghost seriously!

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CHAPTER XV

In a haunted house—A strange story—A ghost described!—An offer declined—Market-day in a market-town—A picturesque crowd—Tombs of ancient warriors—An old tradition—Popular errors—A chat by the way—The modern Puritan—A forgotten battle-ground—At the sign of the "Bull."

REACHING the next field we saw the house before us, a small, plain, box-like structure of brick, roofed with slate, and having a tiny neglected garden in front divided from the farm lands by a low wall. An unpretentious, commonplace house it was, of the early Victorian small villa type, looking woefully out of place in the pleasant green country, like a tiny town villa that had gone astray and felt uncomfortable in its unsuitable surroundings. At least we had expected to find an old-fashioned and perhaps picturesque farmstead, weathered and gray, with casement windows and ivy-clad walls. Nothing could well have been farther from our ideal of a haunted dwelling than what we beheld; no high-spirited or proper-minded ghost, we felt, would have anything to do with such a place, and presuming that he existed, he at once fell in our estimation—we despised him! I frankly own that this was not the proper spirit in which to commence our investigations—we ought to have kept an open mind, free from prejudice. Who

were we that we should judge what was a suitable house for a ghost to haunt? But it did look so prosaic, and looks count for so much in this world! The flat front of the house was pierced with five sash windows, three on the top story and two on the ground floor below, with the doorway between,—the sort of house that a child first draws.

We did not enter the little garden, nor approach the regulation front door, for both had the appearance of being seldom used, but, wandering around, we came upon a side entrance facing some farm outbuildings. We ventured to knock at the door here, which was opened by the farmer's wife herself, as it proved; the door led directly into the kitchen, where we observed the farmer seated by the fireplace, apparently awaiting his mid-day dinner. We at once apologised for our intrusion, and asked if it were the haunted house that we had read accounts of in the London papers, and, if so, might we be allowed just to take a glance at the haunted room? "This is the haunted house," replied the farmer with emphasis, "and you can see over it with pleasure if you like; the wifie will show you over." So far fortune favoured us. The "wifie" at the time was busily occupied in peeling potatoes "for the men's meal," she explained, "but when I've done I'll be very glad to show you over and tell you anything." Thereupon she politely offered us a chair to rest on whilst she completed her culinary operations. "I must get the potatoes in the pot first," she excused herself, "or they won't be done in time."

"Pray don't hurry," we replied; "it's only too kind of you to show us the house at all."

Then we opened a conversation with the farmer; he looked an honest, hard-working man; his face was sunburnt, and his hands showed signs of toil. I should say that there was no romance about him, nor suspicion of any such thing. The day was warm, and he was sitting at ease in his shirt sleeves. "I suppose you get a number of people here to see the place?" we remarked by way of breaking the ice. "Yes, that we do; lots of folk come to see the house and hear about the ghost. We've had people come specially all the way from London since it's got into the papers; two newspaper writers came down not long ago and made a lot of notes; they be coming down again to sleep in the house one night. We gets a quantity of letters too from folk asking to see the house. Have I ever seen the ghost? No, I cannot rightly say as how I have, but I've heard him often. There's strange noises and bangings going on at nights, just like the moving about of heavy furniture on the floors, and knockings on the walls; the noises used to keep me awake at first, but now I've got used to them and they don't trouble me. Sometimes, though, I wakes up when the noises are louder than usual, or my wife wakes me up when she gets nervous listening to them, but I only says, 'The ghost is lively to-night,' and go to sleep again. I've got used to him, you see, but he upsets the missus a lot. You see she's seen the ghost several times, and I only hear him." The wife meanwhile was intent on her work

and made no remark. "This is all very strange and interesting," we exclaimed; "and so the house is really haunted?" Now it was the wife's turn. "I should rather think so," she broke in, "and you'd think so too if you only slept a night here, or tried to, for you'd not get much sleep unless you are used to noises, I can tell you: they're awful at times. I daren't be in the house alone after sundown, I'm that afraid." "And you've actually seen the ghost?" I broke in. "Yes, that I have, three or four times quite plainly, and several times not quite so plainly; he quite terrifies me, and one never knows when to expect him." "Ah! that's an unfortunate way ghosts have," we remarked sympathetically, "but good-mannered ones are never troublesome in the daytime: that's one blessing."

Eventually the busy housewife finished her task, and the peeled potatoes were safely put in the pot to boil. At this juncture she turned to us and said she was free for a time and would be very pleased to show us over the house and give us any information we wished, which was very kind of her. We then slipped a certain coin of the realm into the hands of her husband as a slight return for the courtesy shown to us. He declared that there was no necessity for us to do this, as they did not wish to make any profit out of their misfortunes, and as he pocketed the coin with thanks said they were only too pleased to show the house to any respectable person. The farmer certainly had an honest, frank face. His wife, we noticed, had a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes, but she said she did not sleep well,

which might account for this. She appeared nervous and did not look straight at us, but this might have been manner. First she led the way to a narrow passage, in the front of the house, that contained the staircase. On either side of this passage was a door, each leading into a separate sitting-room, both of which rooms were bare, being entirely void of furniture. Then she told her own story, which I repeat here from memory, aided by a few hasty notes I made at the time. "Ever since we came to this house we have been disturbed by strange noises at nights. They commenced on the very first night we slept here, just after we had gone to bed. It sounded for all the world as though some one were in the house moving things about, and every now and then there was a bang as though some heavy weight had fallen. We got up and looked about, but there was no one in the place, and everything was just as we left it. At first we thought the wind must have blown the doors to, for it was a stormy night, and my husband said he thought perhaps there were rats in the house. This went on for some weeks, and we could not account for it, but we never thought of the house being haunted. We were puzzled but not alarmed. Then one night, when my husband had gone to bed before me (I had sat up late for some reason), and I was just going up that staircase, I distinctly saw a little, bent old man with a wrinkled face standing on the top and looking steadily down at me. For the moment I wondered who he could be, never dreaming he was a ghost, so I rushed upstairs to him and he vanished. Then I shook and

trembled all over, for I felt I had seen an apparition. When I got into the bedroom I shut the door, and on looking round saw the ghost again quite plainly for a moment, and then he vanished as before. Since then I've seen him about the house in several places."

Next she showed us into the empty sitting-room to the left of the staircase; the floor of this was paved with bricks. "It was from this room," she continued, "that the noises seemed to come mostly, just as though some one were knocking a lot of things about in it. This struck us as singular, so one day we carefully examined the room and discovered in that corner that the flooring was very uneven, and then we noticed besides that the bricks there were stained as though some dark substance had been spilled over them. It at once struck me that some one might have been murdered and buried there, and it was the ghost of the murdered man I had seen. So we took up the bricks and dug down in the earth below, and found some bones, a gold ring, and some pieces of silk. You can see where the bricks were taken up and relaid. I'm positive it was a ghost I saw. The noises still continue, though I've not seen the ghost since we dug up the bones." After this, there being nothing more to be seen or told, we returned to the kitchen. Here we again interviewed the farmer, and found out from him that the town of Spilsby, with a good inn, was only a mile away. Thereupon I decided to myself that we would drive on to Spilsby, secure accommodation there for wife and horses for the night, and that I would come back alone and sleep in the haunted

room, if I could arrange matters. With the carriage rugs, the carriage lamp and candles, some creature comforts from the inn, and a plentiful supply of tobacco, it appeared to me that I could manage to pass the night pretty comfortably; and if the ghost looked in—well, I would approach him in a friendly spirit and, he being agreeable, we might spend quite a festive evening together! If the ghost did not favour me, at least I might hear the noises—it would be something to hear a ghost! Thereupon I mentioned my views to the farmer; he made no objection to the arrangement, simply suggesting that I should consult the "missus" as to details; but alas! she did not approve. "You know," she said, addressing her husband, "the gentleman might take all the trouble to come and be disappointed; the ghost might be quiet that very night; he was quiet one night, you remember. Besides, we promised the two gentlemen from the London paper that they should come first, and we cannot break our word." Appeals from this decision were in vain; the wife would not hear of our sleeping the night there on any terms, all forms of persuasion were in vain. Manifestly our presence in the haunted chamber for the night was not desired by the wife. As entreaties were useless there was nothing for it but to depart, which we did after again thanking them for the courtesies already shown; it was not for us to resent the refusal. "Every Englishman's house is his castle" according to English law, and if a ghost breaks the rule—well, "the law does not recognise ghosts." So, with a sense of disappointment

amounting almost to disillusion, we departed. I feel quite hopeless now of ever seeing a ghost, and have become weary of merely reading about his doings in papers and magazines. I must say that ghosts, both old and new, appear to behave in a most inconsiderate manner; they go where they are not wanted and worry people who positively dislike them and strongly object to their presence, whilst those who would really take an interest in them they leave "severely alone!"

Arriving at Spilsby we found it to be market-day there, and the clean and neat little town (chiefly composed of old and pleasantly grouped buildings) looked quite gay and picturesque with its motley crowds of farmers and their wives, together with a goodly scattering of country folk. The womankind favoured bright-hued dresses and red shawls, that made a moving confusion of colour suggestive of a scene abroad — indeed, the town that bright sunny day had quite a foreign appearance, and had it not been for the very English names and words on the shops and walls around, we might easily have persuaded ourselves that we were abroad. To add to the picturesqueness of the prospect, out of the thronged market-place rose the tall tapering medieval cross of stone; the shaft of this was ancient, and only the cross on the top was modern, and even the latter was becoming mellowed by time into harmony with the rest. The whole scene composed most happily, and it struck us that it would make an excellent motive for a painting with the title, "Market-day in an old English town."

Will any artist reader, in search of a fresh subject and new ground, take the hint, I wonder?

Not far from the inn we noticed a bronze statue, set as usual upon a stone pedestal of the prevailing type, reminding us of the numerous statues of a like kind that help so successfully to disfigure our London streets. I must say that this statue had a very latter-day look, little in accord with the unpretentious old-world buildings that surrounded it. Bronze under the English climate assumes a dismal, dirty, greeny-browny-gray — a most depressing colour. At the foot of the statue was an anchor. Who was this man, and what great wrong had he done, we wondered, to be memorialised thus? So we went to see, and on the pedestal we read—

SIR JOHN FRANKLIN
Discoverer of the North West Passage
Born at Spilsby
April 1786.
Died in the Arctic Regions
June 1847.

After this we visited the church, here let me honestly confess, not for the sake of worship or curiosity, but for a moment's restful quiet. The inn was uncomfortably crowded, a farmers' "Ordinary" was being held there. The roadways of the town were thronged; there were stalls erected in the market square from which noisy vendors gave forth torrents of eloquence upon the virtues of the goods they had to sell,—especially eloquent and strong of voice was a certain seller of spectacles, but he was hard pressed in these respects by the agent of some

wonderful medicine that cured all diseases. The country folk gathered round them, and others listened with apparent interest to their appeals, but so far as we could observe purchased nothing. Spilsby on a market-day was undoubtedly picturesque, with a picturesqueness that pleased our artistic eye, but the ear was not gratified; for once we felt that deafness would have been a blessing! We sought for peace and rest within the church and found it; not a soul was there, and the stillness seemed to us, just then, profound. It is well to keep our churches open on week days for prayer and meditation, but the worshippers, where are they engaged till the next Sunday? To the majority of people in the world religion is an affair of Sundays. Whilst travelling in the Western States some years ago, I suggested meekly to an American, who was showing me over his flourishing few-year-old city (it is bigger and older now) with manifest pride at its rapid commercial prosperity, that it seemed to me a rather wicked place. "Waal now," he said, "I'll just grant you we're pretty bad on week days, but I guess we're mighty good on Sundays; that's so. Now you needn't look aghast, you Britishers are not much better than the rest of the world. I was a sea captain formerly, and on one voyage I hailed one of your passing ships China bound. 'What's your cargo, John?' shouts I. 'Missionaries and idols,' replies he. 'Honest John!' I shouted back." This reminds me of a curious incident that came under my notice in London not so very long ago. I had an

old English bracket clock that I took myself to a wholesale firm of clock-makers to be repaired. Whilst in the shop I noticed a peculiar piece of mechanism, the purpose of which puzzled me, so I sought for information. "Oh!" replied one of the firm, "that's a special order for a temple in China; it is to work an idol and make him move." This is an absolute fact. Presumably that clock-maker was an excellent Christian in his own estimation. I do not know whether there was anything in my look that he considered called for an explanation, but he added, "Business is business, you know; you'd be astonished what funny orders we sometimes have in our trade. Only the other day a firm sounded us if we would undertake to make some imitation 'genuine' Elizabethan clocks; they sent us one to copy. But we replied declining, merely stating that we had so far conducted our business honestly, and intended always to do so." So, according to the ethics of our informant, it is not dishonest to make clock-work intended to secretly make an idol move, but it is dishonest to make imitation medieval clocks! Such are the refinements of modern commerce!

Now, after this over-long digression, to return to the interior of Spilsby church, here we discovered a number of very interesting and some curious monuments to the Willoughby family, in a side chapel railed off from the nave. On one of the altar-tombs is the recumbent effigy of John, the first Baron Willoughby, and Joan, his wife. The baron is represented in full armour, with shield and sword

and crossed legs; his lady is shown with a tightly-fitting gown and loosely-robed mantle over. This baron fought at Crecy and died three years afterwards. On another tomb is a fine alabaster effigy of John the second Baron, who took part in the battle of Poictiers; he is also represented in full armour, with his head resting on a helmet, and diminutive figures of monks support, or adorn, this tomb. There are also other fine tombs to older warriors, but of less interest; one huge monument has a very curious carved statue of a wild man on it, the meaning of which is not very apparent. It used to be an accepted tradition that when an ancient warrior was shown in effigy with his legs crossed, he had been a Crusader, but Dr. Cox, the eminent archæologist and antiquary, declares that this does not follow. "It is a popular error," he says, "to suppose that cross-legged effigies are certain proofs that those they represented were Crusaders. In proof of this many well-known Crusaders were not represented as cross-legged, and the habit of crossing the legs was common long after the Crusades had terminated." I am sorry to find that such a poetical tradition has no foundation in fact, and must therefore share the fate of so many other picturesque fictions that one would fondly cling to if one could. Sometimes I wish that learned antiquaries, for the sake of old-world romance, would keep their doubts to themselves. Romance is not religion; one takes a legend with a grain of salt, but there is always the bare possibility that it may be true, unless shown

otherwise. It is just this that charms. Why needlessly undo it?

Now, after Dr. Cox's dictum, whenever I see a cross-legged effigy of a mailed warrior, I am perplexed to know why he is so shown. Will learned antiquaries kindly explain? It is rather provoking to the inquiring mind to say it does not mean one thing, and yet not define what else it means. From what I know of the medieval sculptor he ever had a purpose in his work, it was always significant. Dr. Cox likewise declares "Whitewash on stones was not an abomination of the Reformation, but was commonly used long before that period." I am glad to know this for the reputation of the Reformation.

At Spilsby we consulted our map, and after much discussion about our next stage, whether it should be to Alford or Horncastle, we eventually decided to drive over the Wolds to the latter town and rest there for the night. It turned out a hilly drive, as we expected; indeed, in this respect, the road would have done credit to Cumberland. On the way we had ample evidence that Lincolnshire was not all "as flat as a pancake," as many people wrongly imagine.

For a mile or so out of Spilsby our road was fairly level, then it began to climb in earnest till we reached the top of the "windy Wolds." High up in the world as we were here, so our horizon was high also, and, looking back, we had a magnificent panorama presented to us. Away below stretched the far-reaching Fenland, spread out like a mighty

living map, with its countless fruitful fields, green meadows, many-tinted woods touched with autumnal gold, winding waterways, deep dykes, white roads, and frequent railways, space-diminished into tiny threads, its mansions, villages, towns, and ancient churches. Conspicuous amongst the last was the tall and stately tower of Boston's famous "stump," faintly showing, needle-like, in the dim, dreamy distance, and marking where the blue land met the bluer sea, for from our elevated standpoint the far-off horizon of the land, seen through the wide space of air, looked as though it had all been washed over with a gigantic brush dipped in deepest indigo. It was a wonderful prospect, a vision of vastness, stretching away from mystery to mystery. The eye could not see, nor the mind comprehend it all at once, and where it faded away into a poetic uncertainty the imagination had full play. It is ever in the far-off that the land of romance lies, the land one never reaches, and that is always dim and dreamy—the near at hand is plainly revealed and commonplace! Of course much depends on the eye of the beholder, but the vague and remote to conjure with have a certain charm and undoubted fascination for most minds. It was of such a prospect as this, it might even have been this very one, that Tennyson pictures in verse—

> Calm and deep peace on this high wold,
>
> . . . . .
>
> Calm and still light on yon great plain
> That sweeps with all its autumn bowers,
> And crowded farms and lessening towers,
> To mingle with the bounding main.

For we were now nearing the birthplace and early home of the great Victorian poet, and he was fond of wandering all the country round, and might well have noted this wonderful view. No poet or painter could pass it by unregarded!

On this spreading upland the light sweet air, coming fresh and free over leagues of land and leagues of sea, met us with its invigorating breath. After the heavy, drowsy air of the Fens it was not only exhilarating but exciting, and we felt impelled to do something, to exert ourselves in some manner —this was no lotus-eating land—so for want of a better object we left the dogcart and started forth on a brisk walk. One would imagine that all the energy of the county would be centred in the Wold region, and that the dwellers in the Fens would be slothful and unenergetic in comparison. Yet the very reverse is the case. The Wolds—townless and railless—are given over to slumberous quietude and primitive agriculture, its inhabitants lead an uneventful life free from all ambition, its churches are poor and small whilst the churches of the Fens in notable contrast are mostly fine and large, its hamlets and villages remain hamlets and villages and do not grow gradually into towns: it is a bit of genuine Old England where old customs remain and simple needs suffice. A land with

> Little about it stirring save a brook!
> A sleepy land, where under the same wheel
> The same old rut would deepen year by year.

On the other hand, the Fenland inhabitants appear to be "full of go" with their growing villages,

prosperous towns, flourishing ports, railways, and waterways. It was energy that converted the wild watery waste of the Fens into a land smiling with crops; it is energy that keeps it so.

As we progressed we lost sight of the Fens, and soon found ourselves in the midst of circling hills that bounded our prospect all around — hills that dipped gently down to shady, wooded valleys, and rose above them to bare, grassy, or fir-fringed summits, bathed in soft sunshine. Along the sloping sides of this glorious upland we could trace the narrow white country roads winding far away and wandering up and down till lost in the growing grayness of the misty distance—just like the roads of Devonshire. Indeed, in parts, the country we passed through distinctly reminded us of Devonshire; it was as far removed from the popular conception of Lincolnshire scenery as a Dutch landscape is from a Derbyshire one. Indeed, a cyclist whom we met that evening at Horncastle declared indignantly to us that he considered Lincolnshire "a fraud"; he had been induced to tour therein under the impression that the roads were "all beautifully level and good going." He had just ridden over the Wolds that day, he explained, hence his disparaging remarks—and he was very angry!

Journeying on we presently reached the lonely, picturesque, and prettily-named village of Mavis Enderby. Its ancient church, a field's space away from the road, looked interesting with its hoary walls, gray stone churchyard cross, and little sun-dial.

In the porch we noted a holy-water stoup supported on four small clustered pillars; the interior of the building we did not see, for the door was locked and we felt too lazy to go and hunt for the key. The top of the cross is adorned with a carving of the Crucifixion on one side, and of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Saviour on the other. The shaft for about half its extent upwards is manifestly ancient, the rest, including of course the sculpturings, is as manifestly modern, though not of yesterday, for the latter portion already shows slight signs of weathering, and has become time-mellowed and lichen-clad. The figures at the top are effectively but roughly carved in faithful imitation of medieval work of the same class. So faithful in fact and spirit indeed is the copy that there is no small danger of antiquaries in the years to come being deceived, and pronouncing the cross to be a rare and well-preserved specimen of fifteenth-century work. Apropos of this carefully studied copying of ancient work it may not be uninteresting to quote here from a letter of Lord Grimthorpe upon the restoration of St. Albans Abbey which he carried out. "It took no small trouble to get them (new stones inserted in the work) worked as roughly as the old ones, so as to make the work homogeneous, and to bewilder antiquaries who pretend to be able to distinguish new work from old; which indeed architects generally make very easy for them."

As we were about leaving we observed an intelligent-looking man leisurely walking on the road, the only living person we had seen in the village by

the way; we asked him if he knew anything about the cross,—who restored it, and when? We were not prepared for the outburst that followed this innocent query. "That popish thing," he exclaimed savagely and contemptuously, "we want another Cromwell, that's about what's the matter, and the sooner he comes the better. I'm a Protestant, and my forefathers were Protestants afore me. Now it's bad enough to have popery inside a church, as has crept in of late years,—lights, incense, vestments, banners, processions; but to boldly bring their cursed popery outside, well——" and he could find no words strong enough to express his detestation of such proceedings, but he looked unutterable things. "I just feel as how I'd like to swear," he exclaimed, "only it's wicked." We sympathised with him, and tried to calm his injured feelings. We prided ourselves on our successful diplomacy; we said, "Now, if Cromwell were only here he would soon have that cross down." This in no way compromised us, but it served somewhat to soothe the stranger's anger. "Ay! that's true," responded he, and regardless of grammar went on, "mighty quick too, he'd mighty soon clear the country of all the popish nonsense. Why, in my young days, we used to have parsons, now we've got priests." He then paused to light his pipe, at which he drew furiously—our question never got answered after all, but, under the circumstances, we thought perhaps it would be well not to repeat it, we did not want a religious declamation—we were pleasure-touring! The lighting of the pipe broke the thread of the discourse for the moment,

and it seemed to us a good opportunity to depart on our way.

The fire of Puritanism, or whatever other name that erst powerful "ism" goes under now, is not extinguished in the land but smoulders; will it ever break out into a destroying flame again? It may; history sometimes repeats itself! The swing of the pendulum just now appears in favour of ritualism, strongly so, it seems to me; who can tell that it may not swing back again? I once asked a New England Puritan of the pure old Cromwellian stock—a refined man, a lover of art and literature—how it was that Puritanism, in days past at any rate, was such a deadly enemy to art? He replied, "It was so, simply of painful necessity. Freedom, religious freedom, is more than art. Priestly tyranny had enslaved art, bribed it into its service, and art had to pay the penalty. Nowadays art has shaken herself free, practically free from her ancient masters, and Puritanism and art are friends. And the Puritan lion may lie down with the art lamb and not hurt him." Which is a comforting thought should the pendulum suddenly swing back again. It seems just now highly improbable, but the improbable occasionally comes to pass. How highly improbable, nay impossible, it would have seemed, say a century or so ago, that incense, vestments, lighted candles on the "altar," would find place in the Church of England service, to say nothing of holy water being used, and "the Angelus bell being rung at the consecration of the elements, and the elevation of the Host," as I read in the

Standard of 29th October 1890, was done at the dedication festival of the Church of St. Mary, in Clumber Park, Worksop! Truly might Cromwell exclaim, were he to come to life again and see these things, "The times are changed!"

Farther on we drove over Winceby Hill, one of the highest points of the Wolds, and the scene of an early encounter between the forces of the King and those of the Parliament; an encounter that is said to have brought Cromwell into prominent notice, of which conflict we shall come upon some relics at Horncastle anon, as well as a curious tradition connected therewith.

Leaving Winceby Hill our road began to descend; the country in front of us, as it were, dropped down, and, far away below, we caught sight of the red-roofed houses of Horncastle, with its gray church beyond, and busy windmills around. It was a long descent, affording us a glorious, far-extending view ahead over a well-wooded, watered, and undulating country flooded with warm sunshine. It looked like a veritable land of promise.

Down we drove till at the foot of our long descent we found ourselves in Horncastle, a quaint old town which has earned for itself more than a local reputation on account of its yearly horse fair,—the largest and most important, we were told, in the kingdom. We rejoiced that we had not arrived the day of the fair; fair-days and market-days are best avoided by the quiet-loving traveller. We had crossed a spur of the Wolds and had touched the fringe of a charming stretch of country agreeably

diversified by heaths and fir forests to the west, where the soil is light and sandy, in great contrast to that of the Fens and of the chalk Wolds. Horncastle, I have said, is a quaint old town ; it struck us as a pleasant one as well, picturesque in parts, especially by the side of the little river Bain that winds through it, and gives it rather a Dutch-like look. The chief portion of the town is built on a horn-shaped extent of land formed by the river. There was also a castle there of which some slight ruins remain, hence the name Horncastle, a bit of information I gleaned from a local paper. Consulting our old and well-used copy of *Paterson* we noticed that the Bull Inn here was given as the coaching and posting house, so we drove up to that old-time hostelry confidently, for it generally holds good in country places that the hotel mentioned in *Paterson* as the best is still the best. The Bull too was a good old-fashioned title, suggestive of the olden days and other ways ; and within its hospitable walls we found comfortable quarters and a most courteous landlord, who also, we discovered, during a chat with him over our evening pipe, was like ourselves a confirmed traveller by road. "There's nothing like it for enjoyment and health," exclaimed he ; "I never felt so well as when I was on the road." Sentiments in which we were one ! Soundly we slept that night beneath the sign of the Bull. The fresh air of the Wolds acted like a powerful narcotic. Our long and interesting day's drive had a pleasant ending !

CHAPTER XVI

Six hilly miles—A vision for a pilgrim—The scenery of the Wolds—Poets' dreams *versus* realities—Tennyson's brook—Somersby—An out-of-the-world spot—Tennyson-land—A historic home—A unique relic of the past—An ancient moated grange—Traditions.

The next morning after breakfast we consulted our map as to the day's doings and wanderings. We found that we were only some six miles or so away from Somersby, Tennyson's birthplace,—six hilly ones they proved to be, but this is a detail. After due consideration we decided that being so comfortable and so much at home in our present quarters we would "take our ease" thereat for still another night and devote the day to exploring Tennyson-land, that is to say, the haunts of his youth. We made out by our map that we could drive to Somersby one way, see something of the country around and beyond, and return by another route, a fact that would give additional interest to our explorations. It would be a delightful little expedition, the morning was fine and sunny, our aneroid was steady at "Fair," the country before us was a *terra incognita*, interesting because of its associations apart from the possible beauty and certain freshness of its scenery.

On leaving Horncastle our road at once com-

menced to climb the Wolds, and as we rose the country around widened out. At the crest of the first hill we rested a while to enjoy the prospect; looking back, our eyes ranged over miles and miles of changeful greenery with the wide over-arching sky above, a sky of a blue that would have done credit to Italy. On the far-off horizon we could just discern the faint outlines of Lincoln's lordly minster, regnant on the hill above the city, a vision that doubtless would have caused the pious medieval pilgrim to go down on his knees,—I write "pious" though I am by no means sure that all medieval pilgrims deserved that epithet. It was in those days a cheap, comparatively safe, if uncomfortable way of travelling, the poor man then had only to assume the garb and manners of a pilgrim to travel and see novel sights and even foreign countries free of expense for board or food, and he might be as lazy as he liked, provided he did not mind a little leisurely walking and going through certain religious observances. The modern tramp was born too late!

As we drove on we had before us a sea of hills, round and green close at hand, fading away by subtle degrees to gray, and from gray to tenderest blue, where in the dim distance the land seemed almost to melt into the sky. Then our road dipped down gradually into a well-wooded country, a glorious country of leafy woods—most charming at Holbeck with its little lakes, an ideal spot on a hot summer's day; and from the woods rose great grassy slopes down which the sunshine glinted in long lines of yellow light, the golden warmth of the sunlit earth being

enhanced by cool shadows of pearly-gray cast by the undulations of the land as well as by cottage, hedge, and tree. The Wolds were very fair to look upon that perfect September day.

The sun-bright air flooded the landscape with its light; an air so clear and pure and sweet, so balmy yet so bracing, it made us exultant and our journey a joy! Sunshine and fresh air, the fresh air of the Wolds, the Downs, the moors, and the mountains, are as inspiriting as champagne, and the finest cure in the world for pessimism! Whenever I feel inclined that way I go a-driving across country and forget all about it! So we drove on in a delightful day-dream, rejoicing that fate had led us into the Lincolnshire highlands. The unassuming beauty of the Wolds gladdened our hearts, there is a soothing simplicity about it that grander scenes fail to convey; it is in no way wonderful, it is much better—it is satisfying! It too is general, it boasts no presiding peak, no special points of scenic importance that compel you to see them with an irritating pretentiousness: it is not even romantic, it is merely benign. It breathes the atmosphere of peace and homeliness, it does not cry aloud to be admired—and surely there is a virtue in repose as well as in assertiveness? And of the two, in this restless age, repose seems to me the more excellent!

What a wonder it is that the guide-book compilers have not discovered Lincolnshire—and what a blessing! As a novelist once said to me, "I grant you Lincolnshire has its charms, but there is nothing to catch hold of in it." Well, I am glad that such is

the case—one cannot always be in the admiring or heroic mood, there is surely a virtue in scenery that simply smiles at you and lulls you to rest. Here is a charming and healthful holiday ground untrodden, and I can only selfishly say that I trust it may long remain so. The beauty of the Wolds awaits its discoverer and interpreter. Tennyson's descriptions of Lincolnshire, unlike those of Scott, are too vague to be popular. He is never individual; you cannot even trace his Locksley Hall, nor his Moated Grange. In the *Life of Lord Tennyson* his son writes, "The localities of my father's subject-poems are wholly imaginary." Tennyson also remarked to Professor Knight, "There are some curious creatures who go about fishing for the people and searching for the places which they fancy must have given rise to my poems. They don't understand or believe that I have any imagination of my own to create the people or places." For this reason, however much the public may admire Tennyson's poetry, his poems have failed to make it enthusiastic over Lincolnshire, or to bring the tripper into the land. The tourist desires to inspect actual places and spots, he would like to see the real Locksley Hall, the Moated Grange, and so forth—and they are not to be found, for they are poets' dreams!

The first hamlet we came to was curiously called Ashby Puerorum, as we afterwards discovered, on account of its having been assigned to the maintenance of the choir boys belonging to Lincoln Cathedral. The little old church stands lonely on

an eminence from which we enjoyed a fine prospect over open wold and sheltered dale. Fortunately, owing doubtless to the want of means, the majority of the churches in the Wolds have not been restored but merely repaired — a distinction with a vast difference. Said a passer-by, at another hamlet farther on our way, "I'm afraid you'll find our church very old-fashioned inside, we're too poor to restore it properly." For once I can exclaim, "Oh blessed poverty!"

Much good ink has been spilt on the vexed question of restoration, so many sins have been committed in its name, that the word has become hateful to antiquaries and archæologists. There is a charm quite incommunicable in words about an ancient fane whose walls are beautified by the bloom of ages, and are hallowed by the oft-repeated prayers of bygone generations of worshippers—generations who have added to its history in stone as the years rolled by. Time has given every such edifice a character of its own, just as it gives each human face its special character. It has imparted an individuality to it; past associations are gathered there, and a past atmosphere seems to be enclosed within. Whilst without, the summer suns and winter storms and frosts of unremembered years have left their mark, all of which give an ancient church a pathetic look, and a poetic charm to be felt rather than defined,—a charm that comes alone of age and old associations, and that therefore no new building, however architecturally perfect but with its history to make, can possibly possess.

Too often, alas! the restorer, when let loose upon an ancient church, restores it so perfectly that he destroys nearly all past history (as well, were it possible, might an aged man's lined and thoughtful face be "restored" to the sweet, though meaningless, simplicity of a baby's). He scrapes the walls most carefully down and makes them outwardly look like new; he possibly restores the fabric backwards to the one period he inclines to, obliterating as far as may be all the storied work of intermediate generations, just in order, forsooth, to make the building all of one style. And upon the unhappy result the grieved antiquary gazes sadly, for its general aspect is no longer ancient, it looks like new, its interest is gone. Sir James Picton has laid down the dictum that the true principle of restoration is this: "Where an unsightly excrescence has been introduced, remove it; where a stone is decayed replace it; where the walls are covered with whitewash, clean them down. If tracery be broken, match it with new of similar character; but spare the antique surface. Do not touch the evidence which time has recorded of the days gone by." In the last sentence lies the very essence of true restoration. A well-known architect once told me that he was commissioned by a great man to design him a little country house wherein he might retire and rusticate away from the trammels of State. "When you design it," said the nobleman to the architect, "be sure you write the word 'cottage' large upon your paper." So I would suggest to the architect-restorer that whenever he is about to restore an ancient building to write the

sentence "Do not touch the evidence which time has recorded of the days gone by" largely in his mind. Within the church of Ashby Puerorum we observed an interesting early sixteenth-century brass to Richard Littlebury, his wife, and quiverful of ten children. Also in the pavement under the communion table a fine incised marble slab to a priest, who is shown in Eucharistic vestments.

Then our road dipped down into a Devonshire-like lane, deep in shade, with high hedgerows on either side, and branching trees overhead, through the rustling foliage of which the softened sunshine shone in a subdued golden-green, delightfully grateful and refreshing to the eye. At the foot of the dip we crossed a little "babbling brook" on a little one-arched bridge,—a brook that flows past the foot of Somersby rectory garden, about half a mile away, and is locally known as "Tennyson's brook." One cannot but believe that this is the exception to the rule, and supplied the poet with the subject of his well-known poem. In this belief the stream had a special charm for us; of itself, though pleasant enough to look upon, it is insignificant, but the magic art of a great poet has made it as famous as many a mighty river, such is the power of the pen; a power that promises to rule the world, and dictate even to dictators! We halted here a little while and watched the tiny clear-watered stream flowing on brightly blue, sparkling and rippling in the light, and here and there, beneath the grassy banks and bramble bushes, showing a lovely translucent tawny tint, and again a tremulous yellow where it glided

over its sandy shallows with many musical murmurings.

Along the road we had come Tennyson in his youth must often have roamed and tarried, for he was in love with the eldest daughter of Mr. Henry Sellwood of Horncastle; and Dame Rumour has it that he composed many of his early poems during those wanderings to and fro between Somersby and that town. The pleasant stretch of country that the road traverses has apparently little, if at all, changed since that time; so, much as it looked to us, must it have looked to the poet, with its leafy woods, its green meadows, its golden cornfields sloping to the sun, with the bounding wolds around, that beautify whilst limiting the prospect.

So driving on we came at last to old-world Somersby, a tiny hamlet that has never heard the sound of the railway whistle, nor known the hand of the modern builder, a spot that might be a hundred miles from anywhere, and seems successfully to avoid the outer world, whilst in turn the outer world as carefully avoids it! Most happy Somersby! We had found Arcadia at last! In this remote nook Time itself seems to be napping, very tenderly has it dealt with the poet's birthplace and the scenes of his boyhood around. Here it is always yesterday. A peace that is not of our time broods incumbent over it, a tranquillity that has been handed down unimpaired from ages past lingers lovingly around.

On one side of the little-travelled road and a trifle back therefrom stands the rambling rectory, with its home-like, yellow-washed walls, and ridged

and red-tiled roof; on the other stands the ancient church hoary with age; while just beyond the rectory is a quaint old manor house, or grange, formerly moated and now half buried in trees—and this is Somersby. A spot worthy of being the birthplace of a great poet, "a haunt of ancient peace."

Approaching the rectory we knocked at the door, or it may be we rang a bell, I am not now sure which, and begged permission to be allowed to sketch or photograph the house, which was freely granted. Emboldened by the readiness to accede to our request we further gave a broad hint of what a great pleasure it would give us just to take a glance within as being the birthplace and early home of so famous a man; this favour was also most courteously granted. It must be well for the present dwellers in the now historic rectory that Somersby is miles from anywhere, and that anywhere in the shape of the nearest town is not a tourist-haunted one, or else they would have small respite from callers asking—I had almost written demanding—to see the place. To such an extent did Carlyle, even in his lifetime, find this tourist trespass that we are told "the genial author of *Sartor Resartus* actually paid a labourer in the parish £5 per annum to take admiring visitors to another farm and pretend that it was Craigenputtock!"

Entering Somersby rectory we were shown the quaint Gothic dining-room, designed and built by the poet's father, that somewhat resembled the interior of a tiny church. A charming chamber, in spite of its ecclesiastical look, for it had the stamp of individuality about it. The oak mantelpiece here

was carved by Tennyson's father; in this there are eleven niches, with a figure of an apostle in each—seven niches over the centre of the fireplace and two on either side. By some error in the design, we were informed, the reverend craftsman had forgotten to provide a niche for the other apostle—surely a strange mistake for a clergyman to make!

In this quiet rectory, right away in the heart of the remote Wolds, Tennyson was born in 1809, whilst still the eventful nineteenth century was young. Under the red roof-trees at the top of the house is situated the attic, "that room—the apple of my heart's delight," as the poet called it. The rectory and garden have happily remained practically unchanged, in all the changeful times that have passed, since those days when the future poet-laureate sang his "matin song" there. At last the hour came when the family had to leave the old home. Tennyson appears to have felt the parting greatly, for he says—

> We leave the well-beloved place
> Where first we gazed upon the sky:
> The roofs that heard our earliest cry,
> Will shelter one of stranger race.

But such partings are inevitable in this world; in a restless age that prefers to rent rather than own its own home, even the plaintiveness of such partings appeals but to the few. The modern mind rather loves change than regrets it; the word "home" means not all it used to do in the days ago!

In the illustration of Somersby rectory, as seen from the garden, given herewith, the room in which

SOMERSBY RECTORY: THE BIRTHPLACE OF TENNYSON.

the poet was born is distinguished by the creeper-grown iron balcony. To the right of the building is shown the gabled exterior of the Gothic dining-room with the sunlight flickering over it, and the curious little statues in the niches thereof, the carved shields built into the wall, the grotesque heads graven on either side of the traceried windows, and lastly, and most noticeably, the quaint gargoyles projecting boldly forth. This addition of Dr. Tennyson to the rectory at once gives it a welcome character, and lifts it out of the commonplace; without such addition the house would be pleasant enough to look upon in a homely way, but featureless. Like human beings, buildings are improved by a little character; there is plenty of insipidity in the world in flesh and blood as well as in bricks, or stones, and mortar.

The old bird-haunted garden behind the rectory —especially beloved by blackbirds and thrushes— with its old-fashioned flower-beds, its summer-house, dark copper beeches, and sunny lawn sloping to the south, remains much as when the Tennyson family were there, and a rustic gate, just as of old, leads to the meadows and *the* brook that "runs babbling to the plain." For the sake of posterity it would be well if this storied rectory, together with the little garden, could be preserved in its original and picturesque simplicity for ever. Any day may be too late! In the historic perspective of the centuries to come, Tennyson will doubtless rank as the greatest poet of a great age—perchance as one of the immortals, for some fames cannot die! and who can

tell with the growing glamour of time whether Somersby rectory, if preserved whilst yet there is the opportunity, may not come to be a place of pilgrimage even as is Stratford-on-Avon? The latter spot Americans love to call "Shakespeare's town," as they delight to term England "the old home"; will it ever be that Somersby will be called "Tennyson's village"? The best memorial of the great Victorian poet would be to religiously preserve his birthplace intact as it now is, and was in the poet's youth; better, far better to do this little to his memory than to erect statues in squares or streets, or place stained-glass windows in cathedrals or churches—these can be produced any day! but his birthplace, overgrown with memories and with the glamour of old associations clinging to it, if by any chance this be lost to us it can never be replaced, neither prayers nor money could do it. Gold cannot purchase memories!

The church of Somersby is small but it is picturesque (in my eyes at any rate), and has the charm of unpretentiousness; you may admire a grand cathedral, but a humble fane like this you may love, which is better. The Christian religion was born of humbleness! The infant Saviour in the lowly manger is ever greater than His servant, a lordly bishop in a palace! So a simple, earnest service in such an unadorned church appeals to me infinitely more, brings the reality of true religion nearer to my heart, than the most elaborate ritual in the most magnificent cathedral (which merely appeals to the senses), as though God could only be approached

through a pompous ceremonial with the aid of priestly intercession, all of which

> Seems to remove the Lord so far away;
> The "Father" was so near in Jesus' day.

Ceremonial belongs properly to paganism, not to Christianity!

The ancient tower of Somersby church is squat and square, it boasts no uprising spire pointing to the sky. The soft sandstone of which it is built has crumbled away in places, and has been patched here and there with red bricks and redder tiles. Its weather-worn walls are now moss-encrusted and lichen-laden; tiny weeds and grasses—bird or wind sown—find a home in many a crevice of the time-rent masonry. The tower is a study of colour, its rugged surface shows plainly the stress and stains of countless winter storms. Yellow and gray stones, green grasses and vegetation, ruddy bricks and broken tiles, form a blending of tints that go to make a harmonious whole, mellowed as they are by the magic hand of Time. The tower stands there silently eloquent of the past, beautiful with a beauty it had not at first, and that is the dower of ages; it looks so pathetic in its patched and crumbling state, yet in spite of all it is strong still. Generations will come and wither away faster than its stones will crumble down.

The most permanent feature of the English landscape is its ancient churches. Kingdoms have waxed and waned, new empires and mighty republics across the seas have been founded, since they first arose,

and still they stand in their old places, watching over the slumbering dead around. But I am rhapsodising, and nowadays this is a literary sin. I acknowledge my transgression and will endeavour to atone for it by merely being descriptive for the future.

On the gable of the porch of Somersby church is an old-fashioned sun-dial—useful on sunny days to reproach laggard worshippers. This bears the not very original motto, "Time passeth." A better motto we noted inscribed on an old Fenland country garden sun-dial as follows, and which struck us as fresh :—

> A clock the time may wrongly tell,
> I never, if the sun shine well.

Within the porch is a well-preserved holy-water stoup.

The interior of the church unfortunately shows signs of restoration, in a mild form truly, but still unwelcome as robbing the fabric of some of its ancient character. Surely of all churches in the wild Wolds this one might have been simply maintained. Possibly the poet's wide renown has been the cause of its undoing; well may Byron sing of "the fatal gift of fame." The church looks not now the same as when Dr. Tennyson preached, and his son, who was to make the family name familiar throughout the world, worshipped there. The obtrusive red-tiled pavement "that rushes at you," to employ an expressive artist's term; the over-neat seats—of varnished pine, if I remember aright—are clean and decent, but they hardly harmonise with the simple

rustic fane. Better far, considering the associations it has acquired, to have preserved the church as Tennyson knew it. Besides these signs of "new wine in old bottles," architecturally speaking, we noticed an intruding harmonium; but this does not matter so much as it is movable, and the eye knowing this can conveniently ignore it, no harm has been permanently done, it is not structural. The instrument is inscribed—

To the glory of God
and in memory of
ALFRED LORD TENNYSON
September 1895.

One cannot but feel that nothing new or mean should have been allowed to find a place here; all the old church needed was to be repaired, that might have been, possibly was, a painful necessity. To do more was to do harm. In his *In Memoriam* Tennyson refers to "the cold baptismal font" (where, according to the Somersby register, the poet was christened on 8th August 1809); this happily remains unchanged—a simple font of shaped stone that well accords with the time-hallowed structure within and the weather-worn walls without. That this has not been improved away is a fact to be thankful for; we might have had some "superior carved art" marble production in its place put there "To the glory of God, and in memory of," etc., the usual excuse for such innovations.

In the graveyard of Somersby, close to the porch stands a genuine medieval churchyard cross in

perfect condition, save for the inevitable weathering of centuries—a sight to delight the heart of an antiquary. A beautifully designed cross it is, in the Perpendicular style, most gracefully proportioned, consisting of a tall octagonal shaft tapering upwards from its base. On the top of the shaft, under an angular canopy, is the figure of the Virgin Mary crowned on one side and a representation of the crucifixion on the other. This cross is, I believe, unique in England, inasmuch as it was neither destroyed by the Puritans nor has it been restored. It only shows that then, as now, Somersby must have been remote and out of the world, or how otherwise can we account for this "superstitious thing" escaping their eagle eyes, even so its escape is a marvel considering that Lincolnshire was one of the strongholds of Puritanism. The peculiar preservation of this one cross in all England, under the circumstances, would almost suggest some unrecorded cause, it is a minor historical mystery! The tomb of Dr. Tennyson is in the churchyard here. "Our father's dust is left alone," pathetically exclaims the poet as he bade a reluctant farewell to the home and scenes of his childhood to wander

> In lands where not a memory strays,
> Nor landmark breathes of other days,
> But all is new unhallow'd ground.

We now turned to inspect the ancient and erst moated grange that stands just beyond the rectory, the gardens of the two houses indeed adjoin. This charming and quaint old home was naturally well known to Tennyson, and within its time-honoured

walls he and his brothers, we learn, used to indulge their boyish pranks. It is reputed to have been designed by Sir J. Vanbrugh; a substantial, imposing-looking building it is of brick, and suggests a massiveness not often obtained in that material. The parapet that runs along the top is embattled, a great doorway finds a place in the centre of the front facing the road, the windows are heavy and round topped, and at each corner of the house is a square little tower that slightly projects. Though it does not wholly answer to either description, it used to be believed by many people to be the original of "The Moated Grange," and by others that of "Locksley Hall." Now that we know that the poet himself has declared such fond suppositions to be fallacies, the matter is settled for ever.

Seen from the roadway, and across the bit of wild garden, as we saw it then, Somersby Grange, with no sign of life about it, not even smoke from chimney, nor stray bird on roof, nor bark of dog; its sombre mass standing darkly forth, gloomy in the shade cast down by overhanging trees of twisted branches and heavy foliage, its weather-stained walls gray and green with age; seen thus, the old grange impressed us greatly, it seemed the very ideal of a haunted house, it positively called for a family ghost. There was, as the Scotch say, an eerie look about it; the gray, grim walls told of past days, and suggested forgotten episodes, an air of olden romance clings thereto, mingled with something of the uncanny. It was a picture and a poem in one—these first, then a building!

Now it fortunately so happened that the night before at Horncastle we had met a Lincolnshire clergyman who took much interest in our journey, past and to come; and, thoughtful-minded, hearing that we proposed to explore Tennyson's country, and knowing that we were total strangers in the land, most kindly offered us introductions to the owners of one or two interesting houses on our way. Somersby Grange, we found, was one of these houses, therefore when we saw the house we felt how fortune favoured us. So, armed with our introduction we boldly made our way to the front door and were made welcome, the lady of the house herself good-naturedly volunteering to show us over. Somehow it seemed on our tour, as I believe I have remarked of a former one, that whenever we met a stranger there we found a friend, and oftentimes, as in this instance, a most kind friend too. This making of friends on the way is one of the special delights of desultory travel by road.

Within, Somersby Grange had quite a cheerful aspect that wholly belied its exterior gloom,—a cheerfulness that we almost resented, for with it all mystery vanished, and the air of romance seemed to fade away. The front door opened directly into a well-lighted panelled hall with a groined ceiling above. The interior was not so interesting as we expected — but then we expected so much. The most notable objects here were the cellars, of which there are a number all below the ground level, so naturally dark and dismal; these tradition asserts to have formerly been dungeons. Some of them have

small arched recesses in the wall, in which, we understood, food for prisoners was supposed to be placed. They certainly would have made desirable dungeons, according to medieval ideas. And we were further informed that certain antiquaries who had inspected the cellars expressed their belief that they had been built for dungeons; possibly the antiquaries in question were right. I always have a great respect for the dictum of learned men, but in this instance, in spite of the unknown authorities, and much as I dislike to differ from well-established tradition, I still strongly incline to the opinion that these underground places were simply intended for cellars. "Dungeons" sounds more romantic truly, but why should such a house be provided with dungeons? Besides, granted they were dungeons, then the difficult question arises, "Where were the cellars?" For such a house, though it might not need dungeons, would certainly require cellars, and bearing in mind its date, a generous allowance thereof!

We were told also that there is a tradition, handed down with the house, according to which there is a long secret subterranean passage leading from one of these cellars to some spot without; but I have heard so many similar stories before of so many other places, that with respect to all such mysterious passages I can only say, "Seeing's believing." The Grange is a substantial building; its walls being three feet thick make it delightfully cool in summer and as delightfully warm in winter. The dweller in the modern villa, mis-termed "desirable" by its owner, knows nothing of the luxury of

such thick walls, nor the saving in coal bills entailed thereby. Somersby Grange is a house to entice the modern speculative builder into, and having done so to point out to him the solid substance thereof as an example of the liberal use of material over and above that nicely calculated as the minimum required to outlast a ground lease. Then possibly the speculative builder would justly reply that to build houses like that to sell would mean the bankruptcy court. These old houses were built for homes, not for one generation, but for many. I am afraid that the changed conditions of life, owing mainly to the cheap communication and rapid transit provided by railways, have caused home building to become almost a lost art. Why, instead of a family living for generations in one place, it is a matter of surprise if they stay more therein than a few years; three appears to be a very general and favourite term!

The interior of Somersby Grange, I have to confess, disappointed us after the promise of its romantic exterior. We failed to discover any old-time tradition connected therewith, no picturesque elopement, no hiding-place for fugitives, no horrible murder—no ghost. Indeed the old home seems to have led quite a respectable and uneventful existence—it is like a novel without a plot!

CHAPTER XVII

A decayed fane—Birds in church—An old manorial hall—Curious creations of the carver's brain—The grotesque *in excelsis*—The old formal garden—Sketching from memory—The beauty of the Wolds—Lovely Lincolnshire!—Advice heeded!—A great character—A headless horseman—Extremes meet—"All's well that ends well."

From Somersby we drove to Bag Enderby. What is the meaning of the curious and distinguishing prefix "bag" it is difficult to divine; it cannot be from "bog," for the hamlet is in the hills and there are no bogs about, nor are there likely to have been any even in the prehistoric times. It might perhaps, but doubtfully, be derived from the Anglo-Saxon "boc," a beech, but this is merely unprofitable guessing. The old church here is very picturesque, externally at any rate, but somewhat dilapidated when we were there, and in want of repair. Like that of Somersby its tower is scarred and weather-worn and picturesque with the picturesqueness of strong decay; by this I mean that though the face of the soft sandstone of which it is built has crumbled away in places so as to give it a pathetic look of untold age, still the decay is merely on the surface, and the softer portions of the stone-work having suffered, the strongest and most enduring remain. The weather-

ing is such as to cause a look rather than a reality of weakness, the walls are massive enough to stand for ages yet, the old builders were fortunately lavish of material; they built for time, if not eternity!

Within, the church shows such unmistakable signs of a regular restoration during the Churchwarden era and of having been untouched since, that it is very interesting as an object lesson of that period of ecclesiastical art,—so few churches being now left to us in this state. Here we noticed the long out-of-date high-backed pews, with a large square family one in the midst, presumably the squire's. The woodwork of some of these pews was worm-eaten, and the cushions thereof mostly moth-holed. The pulpit is a two-decker affair of plain panelled deal, such as in a few more years one may expect to find only in a museum—if there.

We noticed on looking up that where the roof joined the tower, or rather failed to join it, we could clearly see the sky, and so on wet days the rain must have free entry to the nave; fortunately there are no pews immediately below! Still in spite of all, or shall I say because of all this, the poor old church appealed to us. It was so charmingly innocent of any attempt at "art" decoration, it happily boasted no pavement of garish tiles suggestive of the modern villa, no Birmingham bright brass-work, no crudely coloured stained-glass windows to offend the eye. Take the pews and pulpit away and it would at once have been delightfully picturesque, and even pews and pulpit sinned artistically and architecturally solely in form, for Time had carefully toned them down to a

perfectly harmless if not an actually pleasing tint. At any rate there was no irritating pretence at misunderstood art; no imitation—a long way off—of medievalism; no false note. The churchwarden was no artist; but then he did not pretend to be one, so far I respect him; and he has wrought infinitely less harm in our churches than the professional restorer, so far I positively bless him! for he did not, of set purpose, destroy old work to show how much better he could do it another way! Truly he was over-fond of whitewashing walls, but this did not destroy them, nor the ancient chiselling thereon. He was not enthusiastic about stained glass, perhaps because it was expensive, and so he preferred plain leaded lights through which one can see the blue sky, green trees, and sunlit country; and certainly, though for other reasons, I prefer, infinitely prefer, plain leaded lights to stained glass—unless the stained glass be very good indeed, much better than ever was obtainable in the churchwarden period. In fine, I consider that the old art-ignorant, much-abused churchwarden has done, comparatively, but small lasting harm to our old churches; his whitewash, that has often preserved interesting frescoes, can be easily removed without hurt, his pews and pulpits can almost as readily be removed. But the havoc a "clever" and proudly opinionated restorer is oftentimes allowed to do with impunity is beyond recall. However it may be I would much rather have the interior of Bag Enderby church, primitive as it is, with its ancient stone pavement in which the ancient brasses were set, than that of Somersby church with

its prim and proper seats, and modern tiled floor, both of which remind me painfully of a recently erected suburban church raised by contract and at the lowest tender "To the glory of God!"

We found a lady in the church; who she was, or why she was there, I cannot tell. We judged that possibly she was the rector's wife or his daughter; but this was pure conjecture, for we did not even know if the rector were married. Moreover, who she was, or why there, concerned us not. I am glad we met her, for she was most courteous in giving us all the information it was in her power to impart. Truly, we had become quite accustomed to such courtesies from utter strangers, but custom did not diminish their pleasantness. By way of introduction she remarked that "the church sadly needed some repairing." We agreed, whether uttered purposely or by accident, we were delighted to hear the expression "repairing" employed instead of "restoring." "We're afraid," continued she, "that some day the roof may fall down upon us during service." We ventured to hope that it would fall down some other time. We tried to be sympathetic, and endeavoured to look properly concerned when we learnt that there were "bats in the belfry," and that "birds make themselves quite at home in the nave, Sundays as well as week-days." We were shocked to hear such bad behaviour of the Lincolnshire birds; but, as we remarked, "birds will be birds all the world over."

Observing an ancient brass let into the pavement in the centre of the church, with an inscription

thereon that looked interesting, we began to examine it; but the lettering was somewhat indistinct from wear, besides being in those puzzling straight up-and-down lines so much favoured in the fifteenth century, and we found considerable difficulty in deciphering it in its entirety, a difficulty enhanced by the dim light at the moment. The strange lady was unable to help us here, but promised, if we would give her our name and address, that she would send us a rubbing of the brass. The kindness of strangers never seemed to fail us, for on our return home we duly found a letter awaiting us with a careful rubbing of the brass enclosed therein. Provided with this, all at our leisure, we read the inscription thus:—*Orate p' aīa Albini d'Enderby qui fecit fieri istam ecclesiam cum campanile qui obiit in Vigilia sī Mathie ap̄o Ā° Dñi MCCCCVII.*, which we roughly did into English: "Pray for the soul of Albinus of Enderby, who caused to be made this church, with bell-tower, who died in the vigil of St. Mathius the apostle, 1407."

The ancient font here is decorated with some curious devices carved in shields; the chief of these we made out—rightly or wrongly, for I should not like to be considered authoritative on the point—to be the Virgin holding the dead Christ; a man, possibly David, playing on a harp; a hart with a tree (query "the tree of life") growing out of his back, which tree the hart is licking with his tongue; a cross surrounded by a crown of thorns, and others. This font was raised above the pavement by a stone slab, a slab that, I regret to add, as is all too plainly

manifest, once formed a notable tombstone, for it is finely incised with a figure and inscription, in great part now covered over by the font! This fine slab, originally oblong in shape, has at some time been deliberately broken in half in order to make it into a square, and further than this, the four corners of the square thus constructed have their ends chiselled away so as to form an octagonal base, more for the saving of space and convenience than ornament, we imagined. This plundering the dead in such a barefaced fashion, even when done for religious purposes, is not a pleasant thing to contemplate.

In one of the windows of the church is preserved a fragment of ancient stained glass that possibly possesses a history, as it represents the armorial bearings of Crowland Abbey, namely, three knives and three scourges, and may have come from there. Amongst the tombs we noticed a mural monument in the chancel to Andrew Gendney, Esquire, who is represented in armour, with his wife and children. This monument, bearing date of 1591, still shows traces of its original colouring though over three centuries old.

Near the church stands a fine elm tree with a long low projecting branch close to the ground. This branch, we were told, was long enough to seat all the inhabitants of the parish, which shows how extraordinarily long the branch is, or how few the inhabitants of this remote hamlet are—we understood the latter was the case.

We next drove to "the old manorial hall" of Harrington, our road being bordered by fine old

branching oaks and leafy elms, the shade of which was very grateful; for though September, the sun shone down in a manner worthy of the dog-days. Reaching our destination, and armed with our introduction, we at once made our way to the rectory. Here we readily obtained the keys both of the church and the Hall, and were provided, moreover, with a servant to act as guide.

Externally Harrington Hall is a bright, sunny-looking, red-brick building, mostly of the Jacobean period, but much modernised, even to the extent of sash-windows. Over the entrance is a stone slab let into the brick-work, and carved with a coat-of-arms. By the side of this is a sun-dial, with the date 1681 engraved thereon. On either side of the doorway are mounting-blocks with steps, very convenient for horse-riders, so much so that I often wonder why they have so generally disappeared.

The old house was tenantless and empty, and wore a sadly forsaken look. In one respect it was the very reverse of Somersby Grange, for while as cheerful in outward appearance as the latter was sombre, within the deserted hall was gloomy and ghost-like, with dismal, if large, bed-chambers leading one into the other in an uncomfortable sort of way, and huge cupboards like little windowless rooms, and rambling passages—a house that had manifestly been altered from time to time with much confusion to its geography. "A sense of mystery" hung over all, and suggested to us that the place must be haunted. But here again, though the very house for a ghost to disport himself in, or to be the

home of a weird legend, it was unblest with either as far as we could make out. A promise of romance there was to the eye, but no fulfilment!

One old chamber, called "the oak room," interested us greatly on account of its exceedingly curious carvings. This chamber was panelled from floor to ceiling. For about three-quarters of the height upwards the panelling was adorned with "linen-pattern" work; above this, round the top of the room, forming a sort of frieze, ran a series of most grotesque carvings, the continuity of the frieze being only broken just above the fireplace, which space was given over to the heraldic pride of various coats-of-arms. Each panel that went to form the frieze had some separate, quaint, or grotesque subject carved thereon; some of the designs, indeed, were so outrageous as to suggest the work of a craftsman fresh from Bedlam! There is a quaintness that overruns its bounds and becomes mere eccentricity.

The grotesque creations of the old monks, though highly improbable and undesirable beings, still looked as though they might have actually lived, and struggled, and breathed. The grotesque creations of the carver of the panels in this room failed in this respect. One could hardly, in the most romantically poetic mood, have given the latter credit for ever existing in this or any other planet where things might be ordered differently; they are all, or nearly all, distinctly impossible. On one of these panels is shown a creature with the head and neck of a swan, the body of a fish (from which body proceed scaled wings of the prehistoric reptile kind),

and a spreading feathered tail, somewhat like a peacock's; the creature had one human foot and one claw!—a very nightmare in carving, and a bad nightmare to boot! Another nondescript animal, leaning to a dragon, was provided with two heads, one in the usual place, and one in the tail with a big eye, each head regarding the other wonderingly. Another creature looked for all the world like a gigantic mouse with a long curling tail, but his head was that of a man. Space will not allow me to enumerate all these strange carvings in detail. It was the very room, after a late and heavy supper such as they had in the olden times, to make a fêted guest dream bad dreams.

The gardens at Harrington Hall, though modest in extent, make delightful wandering, with their ample walks and old-fashioned flower-beds, formal and colourful, the colours being enhanced by a background of ivy-covered wall and deep-green yew hedge. But what charmed us most here was a raised terrace with a very wide walk on the top. From this we could look down on the gardens on one hand and over the park-like meadows on the other, the terrace doing duty as a boundary wall as well as a raised promenade—an excellent idea. Why, I wonder, do we not plan such terraces nowadays? they form such delightful promenades and are so picturesque besides, with a picturesqueness that recalls many an old-world love story and historical episode. What would the gardens of Haddon Hall be without the famous terrace, so beloved by artists, and so often painted and photographed? With the

coming of the landscape gardener, alas! the restful past-time garden of our ancestors went out of fashion, and with it the old garden architecture also. Formerly the artificialness of the garden was acknowledged. The garden is still an artificial production —Nature more or less tamed—but instead of glorying in the fact we try to disguise it. The architect's work now stops at the house, so we find no longer in our gardens the quaint sun-dial, the stone terrace, the built summer-house—a real house, though tiny, and structurally decorative—the recessed and roomy seat-ways that Marcus Stone so delights to paint, the fountains, and the like; yet what pleasant and picturesque features they all are! Now we have the uncomfortable rustic seat and ugly rustic summer-house of wood, generally deal, and varnished, because they look more rural! Still there are some people who think the old way best!

The small church at Harrington is apparently a modern building, containing, however, in strange contrast to its new-looking walls, a series of ancient and very interesting tombs. I say the church is apparently modern, for I have seen ancient churches so thoroughly restored as to seem only just finished. But the restorer, or rebuilder, here deserves a word of praise for the careful manner in which the monuments of armoured warriors and others, ages ago dust and ashes, have been cared for. These monuments are to the Harrington and Coppledike families, and range from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, supplying a good example of almost every style of sepulchral memorial to the dead, beginning

with the stone effigy, in full armour, of Sir Iohn de Harrington, who is represented with his legs crossed; then passing through incised slabs and brasses to the more elaborate altar-tomb; and from this to the mural monument, where the figures are shown as kneeling, not recumbent; and lastly, to the period when the sculptured figures disappear altogether, and the portraits of the underlying dead give place to mere lettering setting forth the many virtues of the departed worthies.

Harrington Hall is another of the places that people, in a vain search after the original of Locksley Hall, have imagined might have stood for the poet's picture, presumably because of its proximity to Somersby, for, as far as the building goes, it affords no clue that "one can catch hold of." It is an old hall, and there the likeness appears to begin and end! In spite of Tennyson's disclaimer, I cannot but feel that, though no particular spot suggested Locksley Hall to him, it is quite possible, if not probable, that he may, consciously or unconsciously, have taken a bit from one place, and a bit from another, and have pieced them together so as to form a whole — a vague whole truly, but still a tangible whole.

To show how unknowingly such a thing may be done, I may mention that I once remember painting a mountain-and-river-scape that I fondly imagined I had evolved from my own brain. As I was at work on this an artist friend (with whom I had often painted in North Wales, our favourite sketching ground) chanced to look in for a smoke and a chat.

"Hullo!" exclaimed he, "what have you got there? Why, it's Moel Siabod and the Llugwy, though I don't know the exact point of view." For the moment I deemed he was joking, as was his wont; but on looking again at the canvas with fresh eyes I saw that, quite unwittingly, I had repeated the general outline of that mountain, with even some details of the landscape of the valley below—not by any means an accurate representation of the scene, but sufficiently like to show how much I was unconsciously indebted to the original for my composition. I have still the painting by me, and on showing it to a friend well acquainted with the district, and after so far enlightening him as to say it was a Welsh view, he declared he knew the very spot I had painted it from! So powerful oftentimes are impressions; for it was solely a forgotten impression I had painted!

Now, it happened that later on our journey we mentioned to a stranger (with whom we gossiped, as we always do with interesting strangers we come across, if they will) the fact that so struck us about Harrington Church, its looking so new, whilst the tombs inside were so old. He exclaimed in reply, "Well, you see the old church was pulled down and entirely rebuilt. It was a pity, but it had to be. Its foundations had given way so that the building was slowly sinking into the ground." This remark brought to our mind one of the few possible clues of subject detail, as showing some distinct local colouring, for in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," we read:—

Yonder in that chapel, slowly sinking now into the ground,
Lies the warrior, my forefather, with his feet upon the hound.

Cross'd! for once he sail'd the sea to crush the Moslem in his pride;
Dead the warrior, dead his glory, dead the cause in which he died.

There truly in Harrington Church is the warrior with his legs crossed, and Harrington is within an easy ramble of Somersby, so doubtless the old church, then possibly "sinking into the ground," with its tombs and ancient hall, were well known to Tennyson in his youth, and doubtless were lastingly impressed upon his romantic mind. It is just the spot that would impress any one of a poetic temperament even now, but more so then than now, when the church was in pathetic decay, broken down with the burden of centuries! It will not escape notice that Tennyson clings to the old tradition that a cross-legged effigy necessarily represents a crusader. Perhaps it is too much to expect a poet to do otherwise, in spite of the dictum of Dr. Cox (before mentioned) and that of other learned authorities who can find it in their hard hearts to destroy a pleasant bit of picturesque and purely harmless fiction.

From Harrington we returned to Horncastle by a roundabout route, passing through South Ormsby and Tetford, a route that led us through the heart of the wild Wolds, and gave us a good insight into its varied and characteristic scenery. A very enjoyable drive it proved, down dale and over hill, past many-tinted woods, gorgeous in their autumn colouring, through sleepy hamlets, and across one little ford, with a footbridge at the side for pedestrians,

with the rounded hills bounding our prospect on every hand. Now the hills would be a wonderful purple-gray in cloud shadow, anon a brilliant golden green as the great gleams of sunshine raked their sloping sides, lighting them up with a warm glory that hardly seemed of this world, so ethereal did they make the solid landscape look.

There is a charm of form, and there is also a charm of colour, less seldom looked for or understood; but when one can have the two at their best combined, as in this instance, then the beauty of a scene is a thing to be remembered, to 'make a mental painting of, to be recalled with a sense of refreshment on a dreary winter's day when the dark fog hangs thick and heavy like a pall over smoky London. P. G. Hamerton, who, if a poor painter, was an excellent critic, and a clever writer upon art (for, like Ruskin, he had a message to give), remarks, "In the Highlands of Scotland we have mountains, but no architecture; in Lincolnshire architecture, but no mountains." Well, I feel inclined to retort, Lincolnshire *has* the architecture—and the Wolds. Truly, the Wolds are not mountains, but picturesquely they will do as a background to architecture even better than mountains. Mountains resent being turned into a mere background to architecture; they are too big, too important, far too assertive; the Wolds are dreamy and distant,—so the very thing.

Many years ago, when they were less known, and little thought of or admired, I spoke of the Norfolk Broads as a land of beauty, worthy of the

attention of tourists and artists. I was smiled at for my pains. Now the painter revels in the Broads, and the tourist has discovered them. To-day I say that Lincolnshire is a land of lovely landscapes, and that its scenery is most paintable and picturesque to those who have eyes to see, and this I have endeavoured to show in some of my sketches. Still I expect to be smiled at for the assertion. "Whoever heard of Lincolnshire being picturesque?" I can fancy people saying. The very remark was made to me when I proclaimed the beauty of the Broads. I bide my time, and wonder when artists will discover Lincolnshire. To be honest, however, I have heard of one artist who has discovered it, but he is very reticent about his "find." Wise man he! If a landscape painter feels he is getting "groovy," and I fear a good many are, let him come to Lincolnshire! Some centres in the county truly are better for his purpose than others, but I will not particularise. I dread even the remote chance of bringing down the cheap tripper. Once I innocently wrote, and in enthusiastic terms, of the charms of a certain beauty-spot that I thought was strangely overlooked and neglected. Well, I have cause to repent my rashness, and accept the well-intentioned hint thrown out to me by the *Saturday Review* some few years ago, thus: "Let Mr. Hissey ponder, and in his topography particularise less in the future. Our appeal, we know, places him in an awkward dilemma; but he can still go on the road and write his impressions without luring the speculative builder, etc. . . . if he deals delicately with his favourite beauty-

spots, and forbears now and then to give local habitation and name." Most excellent advice! That I have followed it to some extent is, I think, shown by the later remarks of the same critic, who writes of a more recent work of mine: "We are relieved to note that Mr. Hissey does not wax eloquent concerning one of the most beautiful and unspoilt towns in Sussex. He passes through it with commendable reticence." It is a pleasant experience for a critic and an author to be of one mind; for an author to profit by a critic's criticisms!

Returning, in due course, to our comfortable quarters at Horncastle, on dismounting from our dog-cart there we noticed an old man standing expectantly in the yard. He was oddly dressed in that shabby-genteel manner that reminded us very much of the out-at-elbows nobleman of the melodrama stage, for in spite of his dress his bearing impressed us; it was dignified. He at once came up to us and exclaimed, "I've got something to show you, that I'm sure you would like to see." I am afraid that we were just a little heated and tired with our long drive and day's explorations; moreover, we were looking eagerly forward to a refreshing cup of afternoon tea, so that we rather abruptly rejected the advances made; but the stranger looked so disappointed that we at once repented our brusqueness, and said we should be pleased to see what he had to show us. Whereupon he beamed again, and pulling an envelope out of his pocket he extracted therefrom a piece of paper, which he handed to us for our inspection, with a smile. On this we read—

Marie Corelli,
with best wishes.
September 12th, 1897.
Horncastle.

"There now," he exclaimed, "Miss Corelli, the famous novelist, wrote that for me the other day when she was in Horncastle. I thought you would like to see her handwriting. I've lots of interesting things I could show you at my house if you like. I've got letters from other great people. I've got Robert Burns's—Bobbie Burns I calls him—snuff-box, for which I have been offered £200 and refused it. I'm a poet, too, and have composed a lot of original poems. I can sing a song with any man. I'm a ventriloquist also, and have given entertainments lasting two hours. I'm the oldest cricketer in England; but I won't detain you longer now. I could go on for an hour or more all about myself, but I daresay you are tired with driving. Here is my name and address," handing us at the same time a rather dirty card. "Now, if you would allow me, I should be pleased to show you round our town at any time, and point out all the interesting things therein, for it is a very interesting old place."

Manifestly we had come upon a character, curious above the general run of characters; the man interested us, we felt glad to have met him, and thereupon arranged that he should show us over the town in half an hour's time. So he departed with a smile promising to meet us in the hotel yard in half an hour. Then we sought the ostler and asked him

about the stranger. We were informed that he was a Mr. Baker, who kept a small sweetmeat-shop in the place, and was a great antiquary. "He always goes after strangers who come here. I expect he saw you come in yesterday; he's been hanging about the yard all the afternoon expecting you back. He's a regular character." So we had concluded; still, antiquarianism and selling sweetmeats did seem an odd mixture!

It so happened that a day or two after this, chance threw us unexpectedly in the company of the famous novelist, who was staying at the same hotel in a Lincolnshire village that we stopped at, and during the course of a conversation about many things, we told her the amusing incident of our being shown her autograph at Horncastle. It appeared that out of pure good-nature Miss Marie Corelli had given Mr. Baker her signature, as he had boldly come to her and asked for it! Possibly had he not been such a manifest character he would not have obtained it so readily, for the autograph-hunter has become a nuisance in the land! Somehow it has always been our fate when taking our driving expeditions to become acquainted with at least one or more notable persons. This tour proved no exception to the rule.

We found Mr. Baker duly awaiting us at the time and place mentioned. First he took us to the church, wherein he pointed out to us thirteen scythe-heads hanging on the north wall, three of which were mounted at the end of poles so as to make rough but effective spears; these, he told us, were relics of

the battle of Winceby Hill, and it was with these primitive but at the period formidable weapons that the Lincolnshire rustics were armed who helped materially to overthrow the King's forces. The rusting relics of the never-returning past interested us, and as we looked upon them the centuries gone seemed somehow to narrow down to years; the mind is beyond time and space! Then our guide pointed out to us the tomb of Sir Ingram Hopton, who was slain at the fight, having previously unseated Cromwell during the struggle. His epitaph, inscribed upon a mural tablet, runs as follows :—

Here Lyeth ye worthy
And Honorable Kt. Sr Ingram
Hopton who paid his debt
To Nature and Duty to his King
And Country in the Attempt
Of seising ye Arch-Rebel
In the Bloody skirmish near
Winceby: Octr ye 6th. A.D.
1643.

"There is a tradition," said Mr. Baker, "that Sir Hopton was killed by having his head struck off at a blow, whereupon his horse rushed away with his headless body, and did not stop till he came to the knight's front door at Horncastle. But I cannot answer for the truth of the story, so you can form your own conclusions in the matter," which we did. Now our self-appointed guide led us to one of the side aisles, and began to lift the matting up from the pavement, in search of a tombstone he wished to show us, but for some inexplicable reason he could

not readily find it. "It can't surely have run away?" we exclaimed, amused at the perplexity of the searcher; "tombstones don't often do that." But the light was rapidly fading; already it was too dim to read inscriptions on the dusky flooring, darkened further by the shadows of the pews, so we left the tomb unseen. If I remember aright it was to the memory of Tennyson's parents-in-law.

Mr. Baker then invited us to his house, an invitation we accepted; we were taken there by what appeared to be a very roundabout way, in order, we imagined, that our guide might point out to us one or two things of interest. First we were shown the square red-brick house near the church which was formerly the home of Mr. Sellwood, whose eldest daughter Tennyson married. Except for this second-hand kind of fame the house is not notable in any way; it is of a comfortable old-fashioned type, without any architectural pretensions whatever—a type that possesses the negative virtue of neither attracting nor offending the eye. As Mr. Baker was a very old man (he told us he was born on 1st November 1814), we ventured to ask him if by any chance he remembered seeing Tennyson as a youth when living at Somersby. He told us that when he was a boy he distinctly remembered Tennyson as a young man. "We did not think much of him then; he used to go rambling miles away from home without his hat; we used to think him a little strange. I have been told as how when he was a boy he was a bit wild like, and would get on a mule and make him go by rattling a tin box, with marbles

in it, right over the animal's ears. He used to be very fond of going into the fields all alone, and lying on his back on the grass smoking a pipe. He was very reserved, and did not talk to people much; and that's about all I know or have heard about him. You see, sir, 'a prophet hath no honour in his own country,' that's Scripture, so it must be true." We nodded assent.

Then Mr. Baker showed us Sir Ingram Hopton's old home in the main street, and going down a narrow lane pointed out some bits of rough and ruined masonry, now built into walls and cottages; these crumbling bits of masonry, we were told, formed portions of the old castle. I must, however, confess that when castles come to this state of decay, they fail to arouse my sympathies, for their history in stone is over, and all their picturesqueness gone. After this we came to Mr. Baker's little sweetmeat-shop, situated in a by-street; we were ushered through the shop into a tiny and somewhat stuffy sitting-room. Here we were bidden to take a chair, and imagine ourselves at home; we did the former, the latter was beyond our power, the surroundings were so unfamiliar! Then Mr. Baker produced a parcel of letters written direct to him from sundry more or less notable people; three of these, we observed, to our surprise, were stamped at the top with the well-known name of an English royal palace. They were all addressed to "Dear Mr. Baker," and bore the signature below of a royal personage! As we looked round the tiny humble parlour at the back of the sweetmeat-shop imme-

diately after glancing at the letters, a certain sense of the incongruity of things struck us forcibly. Then we were handed another letter from the famous cricketer, Mr. W. G. Grace, complimenting Mr. Baker on his old round-arm bowling! "Maybe you would hardly think it," remarked our host, "to look at me now, a gray old man, but I was a great cricketer once. Why, I bowled out at the very first ball the late Roger Iddison, when he was captain of the All-England Eleven." We felt inclined just then to say that we could believe anything! So we accepted the statement as a matter of course that the French (which one we were not told) Ambassador had been to see Mr. Baker. After this we were allowed to gaze upon and even handle his treasure of treasures, namely, the snuff-box of "Bobbie Burns, the great Scotch poet," in the shape of a small horn with a silver lid. This, we were assured, had once belonged to Burns. It may have done; anyway, on the lid is inscribed "R. B., 1768," and it looks that age.

Mr. Baker informed us that though he kept only a very small and unpretending sweet-shop, his mother's ancestors were titled, "but really the deed makes the nobleman and I make excellent sweets. I send them everywhere," he said; "you must try them," whereupon he presented us with a tin box full of his "Noted Bull's-Eyes." Let me here state that the bull's-eyes proved to be most excellent. I make this statement on the best authority, having given them to my children, and children should be the best judges of such luxuries, and they pronounced

them "most delicious." Then Mr. Baker insisted upon singing to us an old English song; he would have added some ventriloquism, but we said that we really could not trespass upon his valuable time and hospitality any longer, so we took our departure, and sought the ease of our inn. We have come upon a goodly number of characters during our many driving tours, but I do not think that we have ever come upon a greater one than Mr. Baker; long may he live yet! That I had never heard of him before I arrived in Horncastle seemed genuinely to surprise him! Well, I had not, "there are so many famous people in the world," as I explained in excuse, "nowadays you cannot really know of them all!" "That's quite true, sir," replied he, and we parted the best of friends. I am sure I was forgiven for my ignorance, for a little later that evening a parcel came for me to my hotel, and I found it to contain a quantity of gingerbread, "With Mr. Baker's compliments!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A friend in a strange land—Horse sold in a church—A sport of the past—Racing the moon!—Facts for the curious—The Champions of England—Scrivelsby Court—Brush magic—Coronation cups—A unique privilege—A blundering inscription—A headless body—Nine miles of beauty—Wragby—At Lincoln—Guides and guide-books—An awkward predicament.

That evening, whilst looking over our day's sketches and notes in our cosy parlour at the Bull, we had a pleasant surprise. "A gentleman to see you," said the be-ribboned waitress, whereupon in walked the antiquarian clergyman whose acquaintance we had made the day before, and who had so kindly given us introductions to the owners of Somersby Grange and Harrington Old Hall. "I've just looked in," exclaimed he, "to hear how you have fared and enjoyed your little exploration—and for a chat," and we bade him a hearty welcome. It was in truth very pleasant to find such good friends in strangers in a strange land!

A very delightful evening we spent together; our friend was a mine of information, a treasury of memories—apparently an inexhaustible mine and treasury—to say nothing of his store of old folk-lore. As he talked, I smoked the pipe of perfect peace—and listened, and took copious notes, most of which,

it proved afterwards, owing to the hurry in jotting them down, I could not make much of! One story amongst the number, however, I managed to take down in a readable form. This relates to an incident that took place last century at one of the great Horncastle horse fairs, a story that we were assured was "absolutely authentic." I grant, for an authentic story, that the date is rather vague, but the exact one was given us, only I cannot make out my figures beyond 17—, but this is a detail; however, the vicar's name is stated, which may afford a clue as to about the year. I transcribe the story from my notebook verbatim, just as we took it down:—Horse sold in Horncastle Church. Two dealers at the great horse fair in 17— tried to sell a horse to the vicar, Dr. Pennington. At their breakfast one Sunday morning the two dealers made a bet of a bottle of wine, one against the other, that he would sell his horse to the vicar first. Both attended divine service, each going in separately and unknown to the other. One sat by the door, intending to catch the vicar as he came out; the other sat close under the pulpit. As the vicar descended from the pulpit after a learned discourse, the dealer under the pulpit whispered, "Your reverence, I'm leaving early to-morrow morning, you'd better secure that mare." The vicar whispered reply, "I'll have her." There is perhaps not very much in the story, but as we were assured by our clergyman friend that it was true, it may be repeated as showing the free and easy manners of the period, when at sundry times rural weddings and christenings had to

be put off from one day to another, because the parson was going out hunting! Yet somehow those old parsons managed to get beloved by their parishioners. They did not preach at them too hard, nor bother the rustic heads over-much about saints'-days, fasts, and feasts, and not at all about vestments, lights on the altar, or incense.

Bull-baiting, we learnt, used to be a favourite sport in Horncastle, and until a few years ago the ring existed in the paved square to which the unfortunate bull was attached. My informant knew an old woman who was lifted on the shoulder of her father to see the last bull baited in 1812. He also related to us a story of a famous local event, "the racing the moon from Lincoln to Horncastle," a distance of twenty-one miles; how that one day a man made a bet that he would leave Lincoln on horseback as the moon rose there, and arrive in Horncastle before it rose in that town, which apparently impossible feat may be explained thus—Lincoln being situated on a hill, any one there could see the moon rise over the low horizon some considerable time before it could be seen rising at Horncastle, the latter place being situated in a hollow and surrounded by heights. It appeared the man raced the moon, and lost by only two minutes, which exact time he was delayed by a closed toll-gate—and a very provoking way of losing a bet, we thought! Amongst other minor things we were informed that the town cricket-field is still called the "wong," that being the Anglo-Saxon for field; also that just outside Horncastle the spot on which the

May Day games were held is still known as Maypole Hill. One old and rather picturesque hostel in the town, the "King's Head" to wit, is leased, we learnt, on condition that it shall be preserved just as it is, which includes a thatched roof. I would that all landlords were as careful of the picturesque!

Respecting some curious old leaden coffins that had been recently unearthed whilst digging foundations in the outskirts of Horncastle, of which the date was uncertain, though the orientation of the coffins pointed to the probability of Christian burial, we were assured that if the lead were pure they would doubtless be of post-Roman date; but, on the other hand, if the lead contained an admixture of tin, they were almost certain to be Roman. A fact for the curious in such things to make note of; according to which, however, it seemed to us, it would be needful to have ancient lead analysed in order to pronounce upon its date. I am glad to say that my antiquarianism has not reached this scientific point, for it turns an interesting study into a costly toil.

Before leaving, our antiquarian friend said we must on no account miss seeing Scrivelsby Court, the home of the Dymokes, the hereditary Grand Champions of England, and lineal descendants of the Marmions. The duty of the Grand Champion is, we understood, to be present at the coronation on horseback, clad in a full suit of armour, gauntlet in hand, ready to challenge the sovereign's claims against all comers. After this the Champion is handed a new gold goblet filled with wine, which

he has to quaff, retaining the cup which is of considerable value. "The house is only two miles and a half from here; you must go there, and be sure and see the gold coronation cups. I'll give you a letter of introduction," exclaimed our good friend, and thereupon he called for pen and ink and paper, and wrote it out at once. Having written and handed us this, he further remarked: "You'll drive into the park through an arched gateway with a lion on the top; the lion has his foot raised when the family are at home, and down when they are away. But now it's getting late, and I really must be off." So our good-natured and entertaining companion, with a hearty hand-shake, departed. Verily we did not fail for friends on the road!

Early next morning we set out to drive to Scrivelsby Court; we could not afford to wait till the afternoon to make our unexpected call—the day was too temptingly fine for that; and moreover we had planned to be in Lincoln that evening, where we expected to find letters from home—Lincoln being one of our "ports of call" for correspondence and parcels. It was a very pleasant and pretty drive from Horncastle to Scrivelsby, the latter half of the way being wholly along a leafy and deep-hedged lane green in shade, and having here and there a thatched cottage to add to its picturesqueness—a bird-beloved lane of the true Devonian type.

Presently we arrived at the stone-arched gateway that gives admission to Scrivelsby Park; here above the Gothic arch we noticed the carved aggressive-looking lion of which we had been told, with a crown

on his rugged head, his paw raised and tail curled, keeping silent watch and ward around, as he has done for centuries past. The gateway at once brought to mind one of the few descriptive lines in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" —

> Here is Locksley Hall, my grandson, here the lion-guarded gate.

We had, fortunately, brought our copy of Tennyson with us into Lincolnshire, so that we were enabled to refer to it from time to time. Driving under the gateway, and along the smooth winding road across the park, we soon came in sight of the house, the greater part of which is unfortunately comparatively modern, and in the Tudor style, the old mansion having been burnt down in 1765, but happily the ancient moat still remains, and this with the time-toned outbuildings makes a pleasant enough picture. Driving under another arched gateway we entered the courtyard, with an old sun-dial in the centre; before us here we noted a charming little oriel window over the entrance porch. Again we were reminded of certain lines in the same poem that seemed to fit in perfectly with the scene :—

> Here we met, our latest meeting—Amy—sixty years ago—
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Just above the gateway tower.

and,

> From that casement where the trailer mantles all the mouldering bricks—
>
> . . . . . .
>
> While I shelter'd in this archway from a day of driving showers—
> Peept the winsome face of Edith.

Now, first at Scrivelsby we have "the lion-guarded gate"; then the second arched gateway we drove through may well be Tennyson's "gateway tower"; further still the "casement where the trailer mantles all the mouldering bricks" might be the oriel window above the porch, as it is a prominent feature from the archway. Though I may be wholly wrong, I cannot help fancying that Scrivelsby has lent bits towards the building up of Locksley Hall. Perhaps I may have looked for resemblances—and so have found them; for it is astonishing how often we find what we look for. "Trifles," to the would-be-discoverer, are "confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ." Some short time ago I was calling on an artist friend, and I observed hanging on the wall of his studio a charming picture representing an ancient home, with great ivy-clad gables, bell-turrets, massive stacks of clustering chimneys, mullioned windows, and all that goes to make a building a poem. "What an ideal place," I promptly exclaimed; "do tell me where it is; I must see the original; it's simply a romance." My friend's reply was somewhat puzzling. "Well, it's in six different counties, so you can't see it all at once!" "Whatever do you mean?" I retorted. "Well," he responded, "it's a composition, if you will know—a bit from one old place, and a bit from another; the bell-turret is from an old Lancashire hall, that curious chimney-stack is from a Worcestershire manor-house, that quaint window I sketched in a Cotswold village, and so forth. I can't locate the house, or give it a distinguishing name, you see." Now this incident

SCRIVELSBY: THE HOME OF THE CHAMPIONS OF ENGLAND.

is an actual fact; if, therefore, an artist could create an old home thus, why not a poet? The poet's task would be by far the easier, for he can so easily generalise; the painter must particularise, the latter could not leave a "lion-guarded gate" to be imagined, he must draw it. Both poet and painter may romance, but the painter has not nearly such a free hand as the poet!

Pulling up at the front door of Scrivelsby Court we sent in our letter of introduction, hardly, however, expecting to be admitted at that early hour; still our usual good fortune prevailed, for not only were we admitted, but the lady of the house herself volunteered to show us over. We observed a few suits of armour in the hall, and some heralds' trumpets hung from the walls thereof with faded silken banners attached, but much of interest was destroyed by the fire of the last century, including the fine and famous old panelling carved with various coats-of-arms. A number of the coronation cups were brought out for our inspection; the majority of these were simply adorned with the initials of the different kings, below which was the royal coat-of-arms. Curiously enough the cup of George IV. was the most artistic by far—I might safely say the only artistic one. On this, in place of the royal arms in the centre, we have a figure of the Champion embossed there. He is represented in a spirited manner mounted on a prancing charger, holding his lance ready poised in one hand; and on the ground in front of him lies his gauntlet as a challenge to all comers. The whole design is enclosed in a raised

wreath of laurel leaves. And a very creditable bit of decorative work it is; wonderfully so considering the time—a fact that seems to prove we have always the artist with us, though certain periods do not encourage him to assert himself. Like the poet, the artist is born, not made; and he may be born out of due season in an inartistic age. On being asked to lift one of these cups we were astonished at its weight; so little accustomed is one to handle gold in the mass that the heaviness of the metal is not at the moment realised.

The hereditary Grand Championship of England is a privilege that goes with the manor of Scrivelsby, and was instituted by the Conqueror; and this brings to mind another peculiar privilege appertaining to the family of "the fearless De Courcys," granted as an acknowledgment of valiant deeds done on the battlefield. The representatives of this ancient family are entitled to the unique right of standing in the royal presence with head covered, and when George IV. visited Ireland in 1821 the then representative of the De Courcys claimed his privilege and stood before the king "bonneted":—

So they gave this graceful honour
To the bold De Courcy's race—
That they ever should dare their helms to wear
Before the king's own face.
And the sons of that line of heroes
To this day their right assume;
For when every head is unbonneted,
They walk in cap and plume!

In the restored church of Scrivelsby most of the

king's Champions rest in peace beneath their stately altar-tombs and ancient brasses. The tomb here of Sir Robert Dymoke, who died in 1545, and who successively performed the duties of Champion at the coronations of Richard III., Henry VII., and Henry VIII., is interesting to antiquaries on account of a curious blunder in the inscription, he being termed thereon "knight baronet" instead of "knight banneret," as is proper — Sir Robert Dymoke, for his services, being entitled to carry the banner of the higher order of knighthood in place of the pennon of the ordinary knight. This strange blunder has sadly perplexed many learned antiquaries, and many theories have been suggested in explanation thereof. The simplest and most probable explanation appears to me to be the quite excusable ignorance of the engraver. It has been thought by some that the error is due to a careless restoration, but I hardly think this to be the case, as I imagine the inscription is the original one, unaltered. The sins of the restorer are great enough surely without adding to them problematically!

Our good clerical and antiquarian friend at Horncastle had told us overnight that some years ago, whilst making alterations in the flooring of Scrivelsby church, a body was found in a coffin with a lump of clay in the place where the head should be. This was the remains of the Dymoke who fought against the king at the battle of Stamford, or as it was popularly called, "Loose-Coat Field." This Dymoke was taken prisoner there, and afterwards beheaded, and his traitor-head was exposed on the tower gate-

way of London Bridge. According to Drayton (*Polyolbion*, xxii.) the men of the defeated army in this encounter

> Cut off their country's coats to haste their speed away
> Which "Loose-Coat Field" is called e'en to this day.

Leaving storied and picturesque Scrivelsby with regret, we retraced our road to Horncastle, and got on the old Lincoln turnpike highway there; a splendid wide coaching road running for some miles along the top of an elevated stretch of ground, from which we obtained glorious prospects over a country of rolling hills (the Wolds) to our right, and over a fine expanse of well-wooded land to our left, a sea of waving greenery stretching away till lost in misty blue. I trust that our coach-travelling ancestors—to whom was granted the privilege of seeing their own country when they made a journey—enjoyed the scenery on the way as much as we did that morning; if so their enjoyment must have been great. But the love of scenery is of recent birth. I sadly fear that our ancestors, from all accounts, thought far more of the comforts of their inns than of the beauties of the landscape they passed through; as for mountains they simply looked upon them as ugly obstructions to easy and speedy travel, and heartily hated them accordingly!

It was one of those fine, fresh, breezy days that make it a delight simply to be out of doors; the atmosphere was life-giving. The sky above was compounded of about equal parts of deep, pure blue and of great white rounded clouds, that as they sailed along caused a ceaseless play of sunshine and

shadow over all the spreading landscape. "Well," exclaimed my wife, "and this is Lincolnshire; I don't wish for a pleasanter country to travel in!" "Nor I," was my response.

The first place we came to was Wragby, some nine miles from Horncastle—nine miles of beauty, if uneventful ones. It was a restful, refreshing stage, without anything special to do or to inspect on the way. We had seen so much of late that we rejoiced for a change in a day-dreamy progress with nothing to disturb our quiet enjoyment of the greenful gladness of the smiling country-side. Wragby is a little decayed market-town, clean and wind-swept; a slumberous spot that seems simply to exist because it has existed. The only moving thing in it when we arrived, as far as we could see, were the great sails of one tall windmill that stood just where the houses ceased and the fields began, and even these sails revolved in a lazy, leisurely fashion, as though hurry were a thing unknown in the place. We did not catch a glimpse of the miller, perhaps because he was asleep whilst the wind worked for him! We did not see a soul in the streets or deserted market-square, but possibly it was the local dinner-hour. So still all things seemed; the clatter and rumbling of our dogcart sounded so loudly in the quiet street, that we felt as though we ought almost to apologise to the inhabitants for disturbing their ancient tranquillity. One can hardly realise what perfect quietude means till one has experienced it in some somnolent rural town at dinner-hour. Such places possess a stillness greater than that of the

country where the birds sing, the leaves of the trees rustle in the wind, and the stream gurgles on its way—all in the minor key truly, still noticeable—to which may be added the sounds that proceed, and carry far, from the many farmsteads, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the bark of dog, the call of shepherd, the rattle of the mowing or reaping machine. No, for perfect quietness (or deadly dulness, if you will) commend me to some old, dreamy, decayed market-town at mid-day!

Wragby is not a picturesque place, not by any stretch of the imagination; nor, in the usual acceptance of the term, is it in any possible way interesting. Yet it interested us, in a mild manner, on account of its homely naturalness, its mellow look, and the indescribable old-world air that brooded over all. It seemed to belong to another day, as though in driving into it we had driven into a past century as well. There was a sense of remoteness about the spot, both of time and space, that appealed strongly to our feelings. A mere matter of sentiment all this, a purely poetic illusion that we gladly gave way to for the time; it is a good thing to be able to romance, now and then, in this most unromantic age!

We drove under the archway of the drowsy and weather-beaten old inn that faced us here, a plain structure enough, but it appealed to us as a relic of the old coaching days. The stable-yard was deserted, erstwhile so busy; for Wragby was an important posting place in the pre-railway age, being the half-way house between Lincoln and Louth, as

well as between Lincoln and Horncastle; for at this spot those two highways meet.

Having aroused some one and stabled our horses, we entered the ancient hostelry, and were shown into a front sitting-room, where, doubtless, in the days gone by, our forefathers feasted and made merry. The saddest feature of this later age is the decay of joyousness in life; we travel luxuriously certainly, but seriously, as we seem to do all else. Our sitting-room had a look as though it had seen better times, the carpet, curtains, and paper were worn and sun-faded, but the room was clean and sweet, and the sunshine streaming in made it more cheerful, to me at any rate, than certain sumptuously furnished drawing-rooms I know well, where the inspiriting sunshine is carefully excluded by blinds, lest it should fade the too expensive upholstering. Yet there is nothing so decorative or so truly beautiful in a room; it is only the poor, if expensive, modern material that fades shabbily. Good old stuff, a Turkey or Persian carpet, old Oriental hangings, tone and improve rather by light, their colours are simply softened down.

"What can we have to eat?" we inquired. "Have you any cold meat?" No, but they could perhaps get us a chop, or we could have some ham and eggs, or bread and cheese. We were hungry, very hungry in fact, for driving across country on a breezy, bracing day is a wonderful appetiser; so, neglecting the counter attractions of bacon and eggs —the standard dish of a homely country inn when other things fail—we elected to have the certain

bread and cheese rather than wait for the doubtful chop; besides, sometimes chops are tough, and oftentimes they are fried, and not grilled as they should be. Presently a coarse but spotless cloth was laid upon the table, napkins were provided, and some wild flowers in an ugly vase made a welcome decoration—the flowers, not the vase! Even the vase had its lowly use, it enhanced the delicate beauty of the flowers by contrast. After all we had no cause to regret our frugal fare, for we enjoyed some delicious home-baked bread with a sweet flavour and a deliciously crisp crust, quite a different article from the insipid production of the London baker, and far more to be desired, an excellent cheese, not made abroad, and some home-brewed ale, nut-brown and foaming, which we quaffed with much satisfaction out of a two-handled tankard. It was truly a simple repast, but then everything of its kind was as good as it could be, and our bill came to only two shillings—one shilling each!

Leaving Wragby we entered upon another very pleasant but uneventful stretch of country; it was a reposeful afternoon, the wind had dropped, and all nature was in a tranquil mood; in sympathy with her so were we. In fact during the whole of the afternoon's drive we neither sketched nor photographed, nor descended once from the dogcart to see this or that; we were content to behold the country from our comfortable seat in a lazy sort of way; and there is a virtue in laziness sometimes. The quiet, pastoral landscape had a drowsy aspect that was most peace-bestowing. We drove leisurely on,

satisfied simply to admire the extended and varied picture gallery that nature presented to us free.

Except the striking prospect of Lincoln that we had towards the end of our dreamy stage, I can only now recall of it a confused memory of green and golden fields; of shady woods, beautiful with the many tints of autumn; of hedgerowed lanes, that in a less lazy mood we should certainly have explored; of picturesque old cottages and rambling time-toned farmsteads, the very picture of contentment; of silvery gliding streams, and a vague blue distance bounding all.

Passing through the long-streeted village of Langworth, a name derived, I take it, from the Anglo-Saxon "lang" long, and "worth" a street or place, so that it is suitably called,—the fine view of Lincoln Minster and city aforementioned was suddenly presented to us, a view not readily to be forgotten! There before us stood the ancient minster with its three stately towers crowning the steep hill that rises so finely and abruptly out of the clustering city below; the triple-towered fane dominating the whole in a truly medieval fashion. No feudal castle ever looked more masterful, or more lordly asserted its supremacy over the dwellings of the people. What a change from the early days when the Church, poor and persecuted like its Master, conquered the world by humility! That day we beheld the Church triumphant. There is no suggestion of poverty or humility about this majestic minster, but there is a plentiful suggestion of dignity and Christian (?) pride. The position of Lincoln Cathedral in stateliness is

unrivalled in England, with the possible exception of that of Durham which in a like manner stands imperial upon its rocky height above the smoky city; but Durham is dark and sombre, whilst Lincoln is bright and clean and beautiful. It may perhaps, though doubtfully, be conceded that Durham has the more romantic situation, and Lincoln the more picturesque—if one can distinguish so.

Lincoln may roughly be divided into two distinct portions, the more ancient and picturesque part being situated on the hill, and clustering immediately around the cathedral; the other and more modern, very modern mostly, with its railways and tram-lined streets, being situated on the level-lying land below; the descent from the former to the latter is by one of the steepest streets—it is called "the Steep" locally, if I remember aright — I verily believe in all England; indeed, it seemed to us, it could not well be much steeper without being perpendicular! In the quaint and ancient part, with its many reminders of the long ago in the shape of time-worn medieval buildings—from ruined castle, fortified gateway, gray and gabled home—we found a comfortable and quiet inn, such as befits a cathedral city; an inn standing almost under the shadow of the stately pile, that rose upwards close by, a solemn shapely mass of pearly-gray against the sunlit sky.

Having secured quarters for the night, the first thing we did was, naturally, to start forth and see the cathedral. Pray do not be alarmed, kind reader, I have neither the intention nor the desire to weary

you with a long detailed description of the sacred edifice. For this I will refer you to the guide-books, of which there are many ; of their quality or utility I cannot speak, for we did not consult one ourselves, preferring to see the cathedral in our own way, and to form our own opinions, and to admire what most impressed us, not what the handbook compilers assert is the most to be admired. Of course by doing this it is quite possible that we may have missed some things of minor note, but nothing, I think, of real importance. Personally I have always found the constant consulting of a guide-book not only to be disturbing but preventive of my gaining an individual impression of a place, for one is but too apt to be influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the opinion of others, often expressed in a most irritatingly dogmatic manner. Some people are so annoyingly certain about the most uncertain things in this world! Moreover, once upon a time, as the fabled stories of childhood begin, I placed implicit faith in guide-books, but as I grew older and knew more, my faith in them, sad to relate, grew feebler, and this because I found that in certain things I knew well about, they were not by any means correct, indeed, often very inexact. After which experience I now feel less inclined than perhaps I should be to trust them in matters of which I am ignorant or not well informed. I may also add that, according to my experience, the personal guide is even less reliable than the printed one ; only you are enabled to cross-question the former, and so indirectly estimate the value of the information imparted—for a tip ; the latter you cannot.

Once I got into rare trouble over a local guide-book. Armed with the precious production I had gone over a very ancient and interesting old church, only to find the little work sadly at fault in many particulars. Whereupon I shut it up and placed it carefully out of harm's way in my pocket, at which point the clerk appeared upon the scene. He was an aged man and talkative, to a certain extent intelligent, and he managed to interest me, so I pulled out the guide-book and began confidentially to expatiate to him upon its numerous failings ; luckless me, I raised a very hornets' nest ! It turned out that the clerk was the author of the work in question, and very proud he was of his production too. He had lived in the place all his life, "man and boy," he indignantly informed me, and thought he ought to know more about the church than an utter stranger. Why, the book had been the work of his life, and was it likely that I, who confessed to having only come there the day before, should know better about "his" church than he did ? Which was no answer to my comments, nor was the request, almost a demand, to let him have the guide-book at the price I had given for it. He would not condescend to discuss the points in dispute, though he kindly confessed I might know a little about "*h*architecture and *h*antiquities, but you know," he loftily exclaimed, with the self-satisfied air of a man having special knowledge, "you know the old saying 'a little learning is a dangerous thing,'" and with this parting shaft he walked away. Poor old man, and if he only knew how sorry we felt that we had so innocently hurt his

feelings! This was a lesson to us never again to run down a work of any kind before strangers, for one of them may be its author! An amusing incident of a somewhat similar nature came under my notice at a dinner-party. The host was a picture-lover and purchaser, not perhaps a very discriminating one, but this is a matter aside; however, he bought pictures and entertained artists, and his dining-room was hung round with numerous paintings, some good, some indifferent. I believe the personality of the artist often unconsciously influenced the host in his purchases; if he liked the man he was biassed in favour of his work. At one of his pleasant little parties, a lady innocently remarked, *sotto voce*, to the gentleman who had taken her down to dinner, possibly more to make conversation than anything else, "Do you see that picture over there? I cannot imagine how Mr. Dash could have bought it; don't you think it a regular daub? I ask you as I understand you are an artist." It was an unfortunate speech, as the reply showed, for the gentleman exclaimed, with an amused smile, be it confessed, "Madam, it's bound to be a daub, for I painted it!"

CHAPTER XIX

"A precious piece of architecture"—Guests at an inn—A pleasant city—Unexpected kindness—A medieval lavatory—An honest lawyer!—The cost of obliging a stranger—Branston—A lost cyclist—In search of a husband!—Dunston Pillar—An architectural puzzle—A Lincolnshire spa—Exploring—An ancient chrismatory.

Lincoln Cathedral is surely, both within and without, one of the most interesting and beautiful in England; its superb central tower is the finest specimen of medieval building of its kind I have so far seen. Were I inclined to be dogmatic, regardless of the possibilities of what I have not beheld, I should proclaim it to be the most beautiful in the world, perfect, as it appears to me to be, in proportion and decoration, besides being so dignified. It is in just this rare, but delightful, quality of dignity that the modern architect somehow so lamentably fails; he may be grand by virtue of mass, he may be picturesque by accident, but dignity he seldom achieves! The chapter house here, with its bold flying buttresses outside and grand groined roof within, is a notable bit of eye-pleasing architecture—but I declared I had no intention of wearying my readers with a detailed description of this cathedral, and already I find myself beginning to do so; and

truly Lincoln Cathedral, above all others, should be seen, not described. Perhaps it may not be out of place here to quote some of Ruskin's remarks on Lincoln and its cathedral, contained in a letter written by the famous art critic to a local celebrity at the time of the opening of the Lincoln School of Art. I quote this the more gladly as, owing to the nature of the communication, it may not be generally known, and all that Ruskin has to say should be worth preserving. Thus then he wrote: "I have always held, and am prepared against all comers to maintain, that the cathedral of Lincoln is out and out the most precious piece of architecture in the British Islands, and, roughly speaking, worth any two other cathedrals we have got. Secondly, that the town of Lincoln is a lovely old English town, and I hope the mayor and common-councilmen won't let any of it (not so much as a house corner) be pulled down to build an institution, or a market, or a penitentiary, or a gunpowder and dynamite mill, or a college, or a gaol, or a barracks, or any other modern luxury." This is true Ruskinian; and fortified by such an expression of such an authority, I feel after all inclined for once to be dogmatic and declare that Lincoln, taking it as a whole, is the loveliest cathedral in the land. Shielded behind Ruskin's great authority I venture this bold opinion; other cathedrals may be admired, Lincoln can not only be admired, it may also be loved. It is not always one finds grandeur thus combined with lovableness!

Within the cathedral we noticed several tweed-

clad tourists amongst the crowd "doing" the building; these were the first regulation tourists we had come upon during our drive, which circumstance brought to our mind the fact, possibly not realised by the many, that our cathedrals have become more like vast museums than places of worship devoted to God. I have attended a cathedral service on a week-day, and have made one of a congregation of five—all told; which seems, to me, a great waste of clerical and choirical energy. I afterwards asked the verger if they did not generally have more people at that particular service, and he replied meaningly, "When the weather is wet we sometimes have fewer." And I could not help wondering whether it might not be possible, on certain occasions, when the elements were especially unpropitious, that the vergers had the elaborate service and superb singing all to themselves! Which is magnificent! When the service in question we attended was over, the tourists, who had been waiting outside, trooped in hurriedly and in numbers more than I could conveniently or perhaps possibly count. I venture to say that in our cathedrals, during the year, the people who come merely for sight-seeing vastly outnumber those who come purely for worship.

Over the ancient fane, and its immediate surroundings, there seems to brood the hush of centuries, a hush heightened rather than broken, when we were there, by the cooing of innumerable pigeons that love to linger about the hoary pile, and give a pleasant touch of life to the steadfast masonry. Leaving the cathedral and the city on the hill

("Above Hill" it is locally called to distinguish it from the city "Below Hill"), we descended to the more modern part. This time we appeared not to tread back the long centuries, but to walk suddenly out of the picturesque past into the very prosaic present, as represented by Lincoln's busy High Street. There we found tram-cars running and jingling along; eager crowds on the pavement; plate-glass-fronted shops, quite "up to date"; and a large railway station asserted its nineteenth-century ugliness,—moreover, right across this thronged thoroughfare was a level railway crossing of the London main line, and when the gates of this were shut, as they were from time to time, crowds of pedestrians and a mass of vehicles collected on either side. I have never seen before a level crossing of an important main line situated in the centre of a busy city High Street. I was under the impression that such things were only allowed in America. I was mistaken. An American gentleman, to whom I spoke of the nuisance of a certain level "railroad" crossing in Chicago, maintained that such a thing could be found in an English city. I stoutly maintained the contrary; he would not be convinced, neither would I. Lincoln proves me wrong. I apologise, in case by any remote chance these lines may catch the eye of that Chicago citizen, whose name I have forgotten.

Of most places there is generally one best view, a view that is distinctly superior to all others; but of Lincoln this cannot be said. The ancient city, with its towered cathedral standing sovereign on its

hill, looks well from almost everywhere; each view has its special character and charm, and no one can be said to be better than another. As we returned to our inn and looked up the High Street, the prospect presented to us of the cathedral raised high over the red-roofed houses, gabled walls, and gray bits of medieval masonry peeping out here and there, with just a touch of mystery superadded by the blue film of smoke that floated veil-like over the lower city, was most poetic; gold and gray showed the sentinel towers as they stood in sunshine or shadow, softly outlined against the darkening sky. Another most effective view of Lincoln is from "the pool," where the river widens out; here the foreground is changed from houses to reflective water with sleepy shipping thereon, shipping of the homely kind that navigates inland waters. But from almost every point "below hill," where the cathedral can be seen as a whole—there is a picture such as the true artist loves; not sensational at all, but simply beautiful and benevolent, which is more to my mind. Lincoln as a picture charms, it does not astonish; it is supremely effective without being in the least theatrical or unreal; unlike the architectural scenery of Italy—if I may be allowed the term—it does not suggest the painting of a drop-scene, nor the background of an opera!

Lincoln "above hill" is not only one of the most pleasant cities in England, it is also one of the most picturesque; it is beautiful close at hand, it is beautiful beheld at a distance.

In the evening we had evidence of having come

back to modern civilisation as represented by a *table d'hôte*, a luxury that we had missed, without regret, at the homely old-fashioned hostelries wherein we had been so comfortably entertained hitherto on the way. It was a simple *table d'hôte*, however, with more of the name than the reality about it, nevertheless it was "served at separate tables" in true British insular fashion. Though the tables were separate we had one allotted to us with a stranger, and, according to the "custom of the country," commenced our meal in mutual silence, neither speaking a word to the other, both being equally to blame in this respect. At an American hotel, under similar circumstances, such unsociability would be considered unmannered—and it would be impossible.

Accustomed so long to the friendliness of the old-fashioned inn, we could not stand the freezing formality of the hotel—it depressed us. So we endeavoured, with the usual commonplaces about the weather and so forth, to break the oppressive silence, only to be answered in gruff monosyllables. This was not promising; even though we might be addressing a man of importance in fact, or solely in his own estimation, surely it would do him no harm to make a show of civility to a stranger that fate had brought him in close contact with at an inn. Truly, he might be a lord or a commercial traveller, we could not tell, nor did it matter to us; we merely wished to be sociable. By tact at last we prevailed. There is no armour against tact and a pleasant manner that costs nothing, and over an after-dinner

cigar—one of the stranger's cigars, by the way, which he pressed upon us as being "so much better than what you buy at hotels"—we actually became such friends that he gave us his card, and, learning that we were on a driving tour, actually added a most pressing invitation for us to come and stay with him at his place in the country, "horses and all." I mention this incident exactly as it occurred. No moral follows, though I could get one in nicely; but I refrain.

Not only is the view of Lincoln's cathedral-crowned city very fine from all around, a proper distance being granted, but the prospects from many points within the elevated portion of the city are also exceedingly lovely, and equally rewarding in their way, commanding, as they do, vast stretches of greenful landscape, varied by spreading woods, and enlivened by the silvery gleam of winding river, not to forget the picturesque trail of white steam from the speeding trains that give a wonderful feeling of life and movement to the view,—a view bounded to the west and south by the faint blue, long, undulating lines of the distant Wolds.

Open to all "the four winds," or more, of heaven, Lincoln "above hill" can never be "stuffy," as many medieval cities are. When we were there the weather was warm and oppressively close in the city "below hill," and a gentleman driving in from the country declared that it was "the hottest day of the year," still in the streets around the cathedral we found a refreshing, if balmy, breeze. Some ancient towns have the pleasing quality of picturesqueness,

but the air in them during the summer-time seems to stagnate. I prefer my picturesqueness, as at Lincoln, air-flushed! Lincoln, too, is clean and sweet. Some ancient cities, though undoubtedly romantic, unhappily possess neither of these virtues. Dirt and evil smells, in my eyes, take a great deal away from the glamour of the beautiful. I can never get enthusiastic over dirt. Even age does not hallow dirt to me.

As we resumed our journey, a short distance from our hotel we noticed a quaint old stone-built house with a pleasant garden in front, a garden divided from the highroad by an iron gateway. The old house looked such a picture that we pulled up to admire it through the open iron-work, which, whilst making a most protective fence, also permitted the passer-by to behold the beauties it enclosed. Most Englishmen prefer the greater privacy afforded by a high wall or a tall oak-board fence. I am selfish enough to do so too, though, from the traveller's point of view, it is very refreshing to eye and mind to be able to get such beauty-peeps beyond the dusty roads.

Observing a lady here plucking flowers in the pleasant garden, we ventured boldly to open the gates, and, with our best bow, begged permission to take a photograph of the picturesque old building. Our request was readily granted, and with a smile. In fact, during the whole of our tour it seemed to us that we had only to ask a favour to have it granted with a smile—all of which was very pleasant. On the road it verily seemed as though life were all sunshine, and everybody an impersonation of good

nature. I know people have gone a-driving across country and found things otherwise; but the world is as we see and make it! They may have frowned on it, and that is a fatal thing to do.

Having taken our photograph, and having expressed our thanks in our best manner to the lady for her kindness, we were about to rejoin the dog-cart, when the lady said, "You seem interested in old places. If you care to step inside I think I can show you something you might like to see." We most gladly accepted the kind and wholly unexpected invitation; it was what, just then, we desired above everything, but never ventured to hope for. Again it was forcibly brought to our mind what a profitable possession is a gracious bearing to the traveller.

Entering the house, let into the wall on one side of the hall, we had pointed out to us a carved stone lavatory of medieval date. At first glance this looked very much like some old altar, but running the whole length of the top we observed a sort of trench; along this in times past, we were told, water used to flow continuously. We could not help fancying that probably this once belonged to a monastery (a similar kind of lavatory may still be seen in the cloisters of Gloucester Cathedral). On the opposite side of the hall we caught sight of a genuine old grandfather's clock with the following motto inscribed thereon, which was fresh to us, and so I quote it:—

Good Times
Bad Times
All Times
Pass On.

Before leaving Lincoln I would call attention to a rather quaint epitaph to be found in the churchyard of St. Mary's-le-Wyford, which runs as follows :—

> Here lies one, believe it if you can,
> Who though an attorney, was an honest man.

This reminds me of a frequently quoted epitaph of a similar nature that a friend of mine assured me he copied many years ago in a Norfolk churchyard when on a walking tour. Unfortunately he was not sure of the name of the churchyard, being a very careless man as to details ; but I have his word that he did not get it out of a book, so I venture to give it here :—

> Here lies an honest lawyer,
> And that's STRANGE.
>
> ———
>
> He never lied before.

The praise in these epitaphs is reversed in another, that sounds rather like an ill-natured version of the preceding ; and as I copied it out of a local magazine I came across on the road, let us hope in charity it is not true :—

> Here lies lawyer Dash ;
> First he lied on one side,
> Then he lied on the other,
> Now he lies on his back.

Just out of Lincoln, when we had escaped the streets and had entered upon a country road, we found a stiff hill before us. From the top of this, looking back, was another fine and comprehensive view of the cathedral and city—a view that almost deserved the much-abused term of romantic. Ever mindful of the welfare of our horses, who gave us so

much pleasure, we dismounted to ease their load. Trudging up the hill we overtook a good-natured-looking man laden with parcels. After exchanging civilities upon the never-failing topic of the weather with him, we incidentally remarked that it was rather a stiff pull up for a hot day. "That it is," responded the stranger, as he stopped to take breath. "We call it Steep Hill. The worst of Lincolnshire is the hills." We noticed that he spoke quite in earnest, and there was the hill before us much in evidence to give point to his complaint. His remark struck us as a curious comment to those who declare that all Lincolnshire is "as flat as a pancake."

Then he asked us where we were going, and we told him. "Ah!" said he, "you'll pass through Branston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and I say this without prejudice, being a Lincolnshire man." Now, as Branston is a Lincolnshire village, we did not exactly see the sequence, but said nothing.

Presently, when we had reached the top of the hill and were about to remount the dog-cart, the stranger exclaimed, "If you see my wife on the way, she's coming to meet me. Would you mind telling her I'm hurrying on as fast as I can with the good things for dinner?" We replied that we should be most happy to oblige him, but as we had not the pleasure of knowing his wife, it would be rather difficult for us to do as he wished. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "there will be no difficulty in the matter. You can't mistake her, she's over fifteen stone!" So, as we proceeded, we kept an outlook for any one answering that description, and in a mile

or so surely enough we met a very stout party walking along. We at once pulled up and gave her the message. Not readily shall I forget the angry flush that came over that good woman's face. "I daresay," shouted she back, "you think it a grand thing to drive about and insult unprotected ladies. A pretty way of amusing yourselves, and I suppose you think yourself a gentleman—a gentleman, indeed? Well, you're not one, so there! I haven't got a husband, thank God! . . ." and so forth in superabundance. We hurriedly drove on to escape the torrent of abuse. Manifestly we had made a mistake, and had addressed the wrong party! We did not think it worth while to attempt an explanation, even could we have got a word in, as she probably would not have believed us, and we might have made matters worse. For the moment we wished we had not been so obliging to a stranger. Shortly after this incident we met another stout party on the way; she might have been fifteen stone, more or less, but with our recent experience we did not venture to address her. We might have made another mistake—with the consequences!

Branston we found to be all that it had been represented to us. A very pretty village indeed it was, composed chiefly of stone-built cottages, pleasantly weather-tinted, many having picturesque porches, and nearly all possessing little flower gardens in front, gay with colour and sweet of odour. The church, too, was aged and gray, and we noticed in the walls some "long-and-short" work showing rude but lasting Saxon masonry and

proving that a church was there before the Conquest. A bit of history told in stone. The hoary fane suggested an interesting interior, but we found the doors to be carefully locked, and we felt in no humour to go a-clerk-hunting ; the day was too temptingly fine to waste any of it in that tiresome sport. Just beyond the village we observed a walled-in park, the gateway piers of which were surmounted by two very grotesque figures.

Branston would have done credit to Devonshire, that county of picturesque villages ; it was of the kind that ladies love to term "sweetly pretty." Were Branston only in Devonshire, near some tourist centres that there abound, I venture to say it would be much painted, photographed, and written about in a laudatory manner, and possibly also have its praises sung of by poets ; but being only in Lincolnshire, out of the traveller's beat, its charms are reserved for the favoured few whom chance may bring that way.

Then driving on through a lovely, lonely country, with fine views to our left, over a well-wooded land that faded away into a mystery of low blue hills, we came in time to four cross-roads, where we found a lady all alone standing beside her tricycle looking hot, tired, and dusty. We saw no guide-post here, just where one would have been most acceptably useful, for we felt doubtful as to our way, our map not being so clear as we could wish—a provoking feature about maps in general, and the one we had in particular ; so, doffing our cap most politely, we asked the lady if she would kindly direct us. "Now

how can I possibly direct you," replied she, "when I don't know the way myself?" We apologised for troubling her, explaining that we had no idea that she was in the same predicament as ourselves, and to propitiate her we offered her the loan of our useless map! We thought the act looked polite, and that perhaps she could understand it better than we could. The offer was a strategic blunder. We realised this as soon as it was made. "If you've got a map," exclaimed she, "why don't you consult it?" Under the circumstances our retort was not very clear. So we wisely said nothing, but quietly consulted between ourselves which road we should take at a venture. "I think straight ahead looks the most travelled and direct," I said. "The one to the left looks much the prettiest," remarked my wife; "let us take it, we are in no hurry to get anywhere, and we shall eventually arrive somewhere—we always do. Put the stupid map away, and let us drive along the pretty road and chance where it leads." So the picturesque prevailed. Perhaps I may here incidentally state that when we set out from Lincoln, Woodhall Spa was our proposed destination for the night.

As we were leaving the spot the cyclist manifestly relented towards us, and exclaimed, perhaps as a sort of explanation of her brusqueness, and perhaps in hope that we might be of service to her after all, "I'm out on a tour with my husband and have lost him! He rode ahead of me to find the way, and that was a good hour ago, and I've been waiting here for him ever since. I'm tired and hungry—and he's got the lunch with him! If you

meet a man on a tricycle with a gray tweed suit on, that's my husband; would you mind telling him I'm here, and ask him to hurry up?" We felt a good deal amused at this request; first we had been asked only that morning by a husband to give a message to his wife, who was unknown to us, and got into rare trouble over the matter; now we were asked by a wife to give a message to her husband, who was equally unknown to us,—should we get into further trouble if we did, we wondered? However, strangely enough, often on our tours have we performed the service of messenger; sometimes we have taken letters and delivered them on the way; once we conveyed the official correspondence from a lonely lighthouse; and once we were sent after a clergyman to take the duties of another clergyman at service. So we have been of use on the road!

Presently our road dipped down and led us to a picturesque village in a hollow, whose name I now forget, but whose pleasantness lingers in my memory. Driving on we noticed on the summit of the spreading uplands to our right, a tall pillar standing alone, a very prominent object in the view, though a long way off. We inquired of a man passing by what it was. "That? oh, that's Dunston Pillar," he replied; "you can see it for miles around in almost every direction. It used to be a lighthouse." "What, a lighthouse so far inland?" we exclaimed. "Yes, that's just what it was. It used to have a huge lantern on the top in the old days, which was always kept lighted at night to guide belated travellers over Lincoln Heath, a rare wild spot

in times gone by, I've heard say not much better than a trackless waste. So you see a lighthouse could be useful inland as well as by the sea." We saw! On referring again to my copy of *Paterson's Roads* I find the following: "Dunston Pillar is a plain quadrangular stone shaft, of a pyramidal shape, that rises to the height of about 100 feet. It was erected when the roads were intricate, and the heath was an extensive waste, and was then of great utility; but as the lands have since been enclosed, and other improvements made, it can now only be considered as a monument of the public spirit of the individual by whom it was constructed."

Then after a few more miles we reached Metheringham, an out-of-the-world, forsaken-looking little town; so out-of-the-world that I do not find it even mentioned in my *Paterson*, and why, or how, it existed at all was a puzzle to us. In times past it was shut away from the world more than now by the wild extensive Lincolnshire Heath on one side, and a narrow, though long, stretch of roadless fenland on the other, so was not very get-at-able.

In the centre of the sleepy old town, midway in the street, stand the remains of its ancient market-cross: these consist of an upright shaft rising from some worn and weathered steps; the place of the cross on the top is now occupied by an ugly petroleum lamp. Even a stern Puritan might have been satisfied with this arrangement, there is nothing in the least superstitious about it, it is convenient but not beautiful. I only wonder that, as the ruined cross stands so handily at the junction of three roads,

it has not been further utilised as a finger-post as well as a lamp-post! I can only put down the omission to do this to an oversight,—a wasted opportunity to add to the disfigurement of the country-side!

We baited the horses at a little inn here, and, whilst they were resting, took a stroll round the place to see if we could find anything of interest, but failed. So we took a glance inside the church, and there we discovered an astonishing specimen of architectural incongruity. The Gothic arches, we observed, were supported by purely classical pillars. How this came about we could not say positively, but we put it down to our old enemy the restorer. We should imagine that it was done at the time that the classical revival was rampant in England, when Wren was in his glory, and only want of money saved many a Gothic building from being altered to taste. Fashions in architecture come and go as do fashions in dress.

Leaving Metheringham, a good-going road that took us through a very pleasant country brought us quickly to the hard-featured village of Martin, composed of brick-built cottages that came close up to the roadway, without as much as a bit of garden in front to soften their uncomeliness, as though land in this wild remote district were as precious as in London, so that every possible inch of it needs must be built on! In the street, as we passed down, we caught a sight of a brick "steeple-house"—I use the term meaningly and of set purpose—quite in keeping with its unprepossessing surroundings.

STIXWOLD FERRY.

I may be wrong, but I do not think a place of worship could well be made uglier—not even if corrugated iron were employed in the endeavour, and much unsightliness can be wrought that way!

At Martin we descended to a narrow stretch of fen, here almost treeless and hedgeless, and wholly wanting the wild, weird beauty of the wider Fenland with its magic of colour, and mystery of distance. Across this monotonous flat, our road led us "as straight as an arrow" for three or four miles, at a rough guess. Half-way over, where there was no possible shelter, it suddenly began to rain, then it poured in torrents and the wind began to blow—well, I am of opinion that you can get as wet on an exposed fenland as anywhere! After all we were not sorry that the road was so straight, we could the sooner get over it.

Leaving the dreary fens without regret, we reached the embanked and slothful river Witham at a spot marked "Ferry" on our map, but where we fortunately found an iron swing-bridge. It was an ugly affair, whereas a ferry would most possibly have been picturesque, like that of Stixwold a little higher up the same river, which I sketched next day, and is herewith engraved, but it was raining hard, and to ferry across, though doubtless a more romantic proceeding, would have meant more discomfiture, so we were glad of the bridge, nor did we begrudge the sixpence toll demanded for the use thereof. Another mile or so of good road brought us to Woodhall Spa, where we arrived dripping and jolly, to find a warm welcome at our hotel. I know not how it is,

but when one arrives by road one seems always ensured of a hearty welcome.

Woodhall Spa is about as unlike the usual run of fashionable watering-places as one can well imagine. It is a charming health resort, but it happily boasts of nothing to attract the purely pleasure-seeking crowd, and on account of the absence of these attractions it appealed to us. The country around also is equally unlike the popular conception of Lincolnshire as it well could be; it is not tame, and it is not flat, except to the west. Woodhall Spa is situated on a dry sandy soil where fir trees flourish, and stretching away to the east of it are wild moors, purple in season with heather, and aglow with golden gorse. It is a land of health, apart from the virtues of its waters, supposed or real. The air we found to be deliciously fragrant and bracing; I do not think that there is a purer or a more exhilarating air to be found in all England, or out of it for that matter. There are no large cities, manufacturing or otherwise, within many a long mile of the district over which the wind blows unimpeded, fresh, and invigorating from every quarter, though sheltered to a certain extent from the east winds by the Wolds beyond Horncastle. So unexpectedly pleased were we with the place; with our comfortable hotel where we felt quite at home away from home; so friendly and interesting did we find the company one and all chance-gathered there (included amongst which was a distinguished novelist; besides a poet not unknown to fame), that we elected to stay at Woodhall Spa for a week though

we had only at first intended to stop there the night!

The spa, we learnt, was discovered by accident whilst boring for coal. The water is strong in iodine, and tastes uncommonly like sea-water, it is naturally, therefore, very disagreeable to drink; one or two invalids we met, however, "swore by it." Gout and rheumatism appear to be the special diseases for which the waters are taken; though one party we met declared the waters "tasted so horrible" that he infinitely preferred the rheumatism! But perhaps he was only a slight sufferer. Nearly every other invalid we spoke to declared that the waters had done them much good; one gentleman who walked very well, and looked very well, informed us that when he came there he was almost a cripple and could hardly walk at all, "and now look at me," exclaimed he, "I'm a walking testimony to the efficacy of the waters." Nobody, however, appeared to give the wonderful vitalising air any credit for their cures or even aiding thereto, yet I am by no means sure that this may not have had a great deal to do with them; an air so dry and bracing, yet withal so soothing, laden as it is with the soft and healing scents of the pine-woods. Good too for over-wrought nerves, I should imagine. Simply to ramble in the pine-woods, and over the moors at and about Woodhall, and there to breathe the splendidly pure and light sweet air was a delight to me; it was like inhaling nectar! When I go to a health resort, I go to breathe the air, not to drink the waters!

Whilst lazing at Woodhall Spa—and there is a great virtue in doing nothing successfully at times—our good-natured Horncastle friend found us out, and kindly placed himself at our disposal for a whole day, which he suggested we should employ in exploring the country round about; so we arranged to drive with him where he would, and accordingly one morning fared forth in his company for a "regular antiquarian day" as he quaintly put it.

Leaving Woodhall we soon came to a bit of open moorland, with a tall ruined tower standing solitary on the highest point thereof, a prominent and picturesque feature in the prospect. This is a portion of a stately hunting-box erected by the Lord-Treasurer Cromwell towards the end of the fifteenth century, who also built the grand Tattershall Castle, which we shall see in due course. This ruined hunting-box is locally known as "the Tower on the Moor," perhaps some day this may suggest a title to a novelist. The interesting country around is, I believe, virgin ground to the romancer, a ground that, it seems to me, would well repay exploiting,—possibly, however, from a hint a famous novelist gave me, it may by this time have been exploited!

Then by a pleasant lane we came to a lonely farmstead called High Rigge. Here we pulled up for a few minutes to inspect a very fine and quite perfect "celt" of smooth-polished greenstone that had lately been ploughed up on one of the farm fields, and was carefully preserved in the house, and I hope it will remain there and not be conveyed away to enrich a private collection, as so many

other relics of the past have been, and thereby lost to the public. It would be a good thing if in each county capital there were a local museum established where such local finds could be preserved and inspected. I feel that each county has a right to the possession of its own antiquarian treasures; such museums too would add greatly to the pleasure and the interest of the tourist and traveller. County people would doubtless take a pride in and contribute to them, so that they would soon become centres of attraction.

From High Rigge we proceeded along a narrow country lane—with gates to open here and there on the way—to a picturesque and interesting old moated house known as Poolham Hall, now doing duty as a farmstead. The house, with the wide moat around, makes a very pleasing picture, but all the interest is external, within is nothing that calls for comment. The moat encircles not only the farm buildings but an ample garden; indeed, the amount of ground it encloses, we were told, was close upon two acres, which shows that Poolham Hall was at one time a place of considerable importance. In the garden stand the crumbling ruins of an ancient oratory, roofless, and ivy-grown, and fast hastening to further decay. Our friend asked where a certain tomb slab was that he remembered seeing there some years back, but it had disappeared no one knew whither; presumably it was the memorial of some important personage buried in the oratory,—the master of the manor with small doubt; however, it has apparently perished, so hard is it in this world

for even "the proud and mighty" to ensure their last resting-place from oblivion or desecration. But better this surely than the fate of certain great Egyptian kings, lordly despots in their day, whose mummified bodies have been exposed to the vulgar gaze, and knocked down at auction in London to the highest bidder! But what matters it? it will all be the same in a million years hence more or less—when this planet with others "may roll round the sun with the dust of a vanished race!" Here in the moat we were told was found a very curious object in decorative earthenware, which proved to be a chrismatory, presumed to have belonged to the oratory; the vessel is provided with two wells for the oil and salt as used in the Roman Catholic Baptismal rite, so our learned guide informed us. This ancient and very curious chrismatory is now carefully preserved in Langton church by Horncastle, and, with permission of the rector, may be seen there by the curious.

CHAPTER XX

A long discourse—The origin of a coat-of-arms—An English serf—A witch-stone—Lincolnshire folk-lore—A collar for lunatics—St. Mary's thistle—A notable robbery—An architectural gem—Coningsby — Tattershall church and castle — Lowland and upland—"Beckingham-behind-the-Times"—Old Lincolnshire folk.

From Poolham Hall we drove on through a lovely country, remote from railways, and pervaded by a peaceful, mellow, homelike look; bound for the out-of-the-world hamlet of Wispington. On the way our antiquarian friend began a long discourse; I write long advisedly because it lasted for nearly, if not quite, four miles, and how much longer it would have lasted I cannot say, for on arriving at a junction of roads, we broke the thread of the discourse by inquiring which road we should take. "Why, bless my soul," exclaimed he, "we've driven two miles out of our way, I quite forgot all about where we were going! This comes of our very interesting conversation." We thought "*our* very interesting conversation" was an excellent conceit, considering that we had been merely patient listeners all the time: however, we jokingly remarked that the talk was worth the added miles, and after all we arrived at Wispington with the best of the

day still before us; there we drove up to the rectory and fortunately found the rector, an enthusiastic antiquary like our companion, at home.

First, we were taken to see the church, a modern one decorated within with carvings in Caen stone representing the animals and birds of the Old Testament done by a former incumbent, and containing some tombstone slabs and brasses preserved from the ancient church it had supplanted. In the pavement of the vestry we had pointed out to us an ancient incised slab (broken) to the memory of John Hetsete, a priest; this was dated 1394. The slab is of much interest as showing the priest in vestments holding a chalice in gloved hands, tightly buttoned. I cannot remember ever having come upon a priest represented thus with gloved hands. I am not sufficient of an antiquary to say whether this feature is unique, it certainly is very uncommon.

A brass, now on the south wall of the church near the porch, is inscribed to the memory of Robert Tyrwhitt; here on a shield is shown the coat-of-arms of the family "three pewits d'or proper on a field gules," if that be the correct heraldic way of putting it. To this coat-of-arms belongs a little history. We were informed that one of the ancestors of the family after a gallant fight in battle with the Scots (name and date unremembered) fell on the field seriously wounded. After long search, he was found by his relations, hidden from view in a bed of reeds, their attention having been attracted to the spot by three pewits hovering over it, uttering

plaintive cries the while. From this circumstance, the family adopted three pewits as their coat-of-arms, likewise taking the name of Tyrwhitt, the latter being supposed to represent the cry of that bird. Thereupon—in the spirit of inquiry that ever besets us—we wanted to know what the name of the family was before that eventful occasion, but could obtain no information on the point. One really should not be so exacting about pretty traditions; it is an artistic sin for the commission of which I now, too late, repent.

Then we returned to the rectory, where the rector most kindly showed us some of his valued antiquarian treasures. One of these consisted of an old parchment document written in Latin, and very beautifully written too, the lettering being as black and as clear as when first done long changeful centuries ago, for the deed bears the date of 1282. The document, which was presumably drafted in the Abbey of Bardney, and was signed in the chapter house thereof, gives particulars of the sale of a serf with his family. A circumstance that throws a startling sidelight on the condition of England at the time. Curiously enough, in a further document, the same serf appears as rector of a neighbouring parish, and even purchases land there in 1285. The true inwardness of all this it would be interesting to discover.

Then the rector brought out a "witch-stone" from his treasure store to show us; this he found hanging on a cottage door and serving as a charm against all evil. It is merely a small flint with a

hole in the centre, through which hole was strung a piece of cord to hang it up with. A "witch-stone" hung up on, or over, the entrance door of a house is supposed to protect the inhabitants from all harm; in the same way do not some enlightened people nail a horse-shoe over their door "for good luck"? To ensure this "good-luck" I understand you must find a horse-shoe "accidentally on the road" without looking for it; to procure a "witch-stone" you must in like manner come upon a stone (of any kind) with a hole through the centre when you are not thinking about any such thing.

Then our host related to us a curious story that had been told to him as true history. According to this, a certain Lincolnshire miser died (I withhold, name, date, and place), and was duly placed in his coffin overnight; but then a strange thing happened, next morning the body had disappeared and its place was taken up with stones; it being presumed that the Devil had made off with his body and had placed the stones in the coffin in exchange. But one would have imagined that it was the man's spirit not his body that his Satanic Majesty desired —but there I am always over-critical and too exacting about details. By the way this reminds me we were told, that the Lincolnshire folk never call the Devil openly by that familiar designation, but speak of him in an undertone, as either "Samuel," "Old Lad," or "Bargus."

Then we gleaned some particulars of old Lincolnshire folk-lore. Here, for example, is an infallible charm to get power over the Devil, I mean "Samuel."

On St. Mark's Eve, precisely at twelve o'clock, hold two pewter platters one over the other, take these to where bracken grows, hold the platters under the plants for the seeds to drop in, then you will find that the seeds will go right through the top platter and be caught in the one below; upon this "Samuel" will appear riding on a pig and tell you anything you want to know. Here is another charm. Kill a hedge-hog and smear two thorn-sticks with his blood, place these in a hedge-bottom and leave them there for fourteen days, if not moved meanwhile you will have your wish. I give these two charms as a fair sample of others, and I think they will well suffice!

Leaving Wispington, we came in about half a mile to a spot where four roads meet, a burial-place for suicides in times past, and reputed to be the centre of Lincolnshire. Then driving on we reached Horsington. In the register of burials here is a notice of "Bridget Hall buried in her own garden A.D. 16 ." She lived at Hail Farm near by, our friend told us, and directed in her will that she should be buried in her own garden, and that her body should be laid north and south, as she considered it "too Popish to be buried east and west in a churchyard!" Some years ago the then occupier of that farm, we further learnt, on digging a drain in the same garden came upon a skeleton lying north and south; presumably that of Bridget Hall.

In the vestry of the church here, according to our informant, used to be preserved in a box a

strange relic of other days and ways, in the shape of a brass collar by which poor unfortunate lunatics were chained to a wall. Where the collar has gone no one seems to know or care; however, it has disappeared, to the grief of antiquaries. "Though I cannot show you the collar, I can still show you something curious and interesting," said our friend. Whereupon he went into the churchyard, and after some searching plucked a thistle; this did not seem anything wonderful to us, not being botanists, but he pointed out to us that it was peculiarly marked with unusual gray lines all over. This, we were informed, is called the "Holy Thistle," or "Mary's Thistle," and it used to be grown by the monks at Kirkstead Abbey a few miles away, and even until a few years ago specimens thereof might have been found in the fields that now surround the abbey ruins, but the farmers had rooted them all up. Arthur Thistlewood of the Cato Street conspiracy was born here at Horsington, we learnt, his real name being Burnet. The birthplace of still another famous man had we come across!

Next we drove on to Halstead Hall, an ancient building set back some way from the road, showing signs of its former importance, but now, like so many other ancient halls, converted into a pleasant farmstead. The hall was moated, but the moat has been drained dry; the house is famous locally for a daring and a remarkable robbery committed there in 1829,—an event that still affords subject for the country folk to talk and enlarge about, at least we heard a good deal about it. The house, we under-

stood, was broken into by a band of robbers who tied up the men-servants in a stable, first gagging them; and then locked up the family and the maids in a store-room. After this they sat down in the hall and feasted; the repast over, they leisurely collected all the silver plate and money they could find, and quietly departed. Three of the band were afterwards captured and hanged at Lincoln; one of them, a certain Timothy Brammer, when on the scaffold, kicked off his shoes, as he declared, to falsify the prophecy of his friends that "he would die in his shoes"; the doing of this appeared to afford him a grim sort of satisfaction. Then by the hamlet of Stixwold we returned to Woodhall Spa after a very interesting "antiquarian day."

We left Woodhall Spa regretfully, and upon mounting our dogcart to resume our tour the genial landlord of the Royal Hotel and most of the guests thereof, whose acquaintance we had made during our too short stay, came to the door to bid us good-bye and a prosperous journey,—yet we had only arrived there a few days before, perfect strangers in the land! Truly we had paid our modest bill, notwithstanding which we left in debt to the landlord for all his kindness to us, for which no charge was made!

It was a cloudy day; the barometer was falling; the wind blew wild and warm from the west. "You'll have rain, and plenty of it," prophesied one of the party; "better stay on till to-morrow." The temptation was great, but if we dallied thus on the way at every pleasant spot we should hardly get

home before the winter, so we hardened our hearts and drove away. The rain did not actually come down, but we noticed great banks of threatening gray storm-clouds in serried ranks gathered on the low horizon that foreboded ill, with an advance guard of vast detached masses of aqueous vapours, wind-woven into fantastic forms. The sky-scape at any rate was interesting. "It looks stormy," exclaimed we, to a man, in response to a polite "Good-morning" he bade us as we passed him by. "It do look so," replied he, "but we won't get any wet worth speaking of whilst this wind keeps up." This was reassuring. We have generally found country folk more reliable about the immediate future of the weather than the falling or rising of the barometer, for local conditions are often an important factor in the case and modify the barometer's forecast.

About a mile on our way we noticed the slight remains of the once famous and wealthy Cistercian Abbey of Kirkstead. These consist simply of a tall fragment of the transept and some walling, standing alone in the midst of a wide grass field. Beyond this, in an adjoining meadow, we espied a most beautiful little Early English chapel, perfectly pure in style. This was enclosed in a neglected-looking graveyard, the rusty gates of which were carefully locked, so that we were, perforce, obliged to climb over them to inspect the building, which was also carefully locked up, and, I regret to add, very fast going to irretrievable decay for the want of a little timely repair. Why, I wonder, is such a rare architectural gem as this allowed to go thus the

way of all uncared-for things? Is there not a "Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings" of interest? Can it do nothing to preserve for us this relic of former days?

At first sight it appears curious to find such a beautiful chapel in such close proximity to a lordly abbey; manifestly, however, the building was a chantry chapel, presumably for the benefit of the soul of the second Lord of Tattershall, as his armoured effigy is still within the desolated chapel, which was, doubtless, erected near to the abbey for the convenience and certainty of priestly service.

As we drove on, shortly the tall tower of Tattershall Castle stood forth ahead of us, showing darkly gray against the stormy sky, a striking object in the level landscape, powerfully asserting itself on the near horizon, some three or four miles by winding road away, though possibly a good mile less "as the crow flies." Soon we came to the little river Bain, which we crossed on a rather creaky wooden bridge —the scenery about the river here is very pretty and most paintable—and found ourselves in Coningsby, a remote Lincolnshire village, whose name, however, has become well known from its having provided Lord Beaconsfield with the title for his famous novel. Coningsby possesses a fine old church, with a somewhat disappointing interior. We noticed in the porch here a large holy-water stoup, opening both internally and externally; above the porch is a parvise chamber of the usual type. Within the church, at the top of a pillar of the north aisle, is a carving of a "scold" gagged, just one of those

subjects that delighted the humour of the medieval sculptor to portray.

Then another mile brought us to Tattershall, a small hamlet dominated and dwarfed by its truly magnificent church (more like a cathedral than a village fane, and of a size out of all proportion to the present, possibly also the past, needs of the parish) and by its stately old castle, towering high above all around. The church we found open, but desolate within, it being given over to workmen for much-needed repairs; the pavement in places, we noticed, was fouled by birds and wet with recent rain that had come in through holes in the roof. It was a pathetic sight to behold the grand old church in its faded magnificence, bare, cold, and colourless, robbed long ago of its glorious stained-glass windows, that once made it the pride of the whole countryside. Strange it seems that these splendid windows, that had miraculously escaped the Puritan crusade, should have been allowed to be carted away only the last century (in 1757) to enrich another church! Truly the Puritans were not the only spoilers. Here in the north transept is preserved a series of exceedingly fine and very interesting, though mutilated and damaged, brasses, removed from their rightful place in the chancel pavement some years ago, and now huddled together in a meaningless way. One of these is of Lord-Treasurer Cromwell, the builder of Tattershall church and castle. Another very fine brass is that of a provost with a richly-adorned cope. These brasses will well repay careful study.

Of Tattershall, besides some insignificant and

much-ruined outbuildings, only the stately tower keep remains. A truly magnificent specimen of medieval brick building, rectangular in shape and embattled on the top; it is flanked on each angle by four octagonal smaller towers. These were formerly provided with high-pitched roofs, of which only one is now extant, though I find from an old engraving, after a drawing by T. Allom, in my possession, that there were three of these roofs existing in 1830. Round the top of the building runs a projecting gallery supported by very bold and massive stone machicolations; these give a special character to the structure, and enhance its effective picturesqueness.

For a castle keep the open Gothic windows seem strangely inconsistent. From this fact one can hardly imagine that it was intended for serious defence, yet, on the other hand, there are plain traces of the double moats that once surrounded the place, and were presumably supplied by water from the river Bain, which suggest a considerable amount of precaution against attack. It may be that the moats formed part of a former stronghold, and were simply retained because they were there. The castle is built of small and very hard brick, said by tradition to have been imported from Flanders. Externally the structure, except for its time-toned look, sundry weather scars, and loss of its three turret-tops, is much the same as when the ancient builders left it; within it is a mere shell, floorless and roofless. In the walls are some fine and well-preserved carved stone mantelpieces, some of which are adorned with

heraldic devices, and a representation of a full purse, symbolic, we imagined, of the post of Lord-Treasurer held by the owner. Over one fireplace we noticed an inscription in Norman-French, *Nay le Droit*, which, rightly or wrongly, we translated into "Have I not the right?"

We ascended to the top of the keep, and beyond to the top of one of the flanking turrets, by a spiral staircase of innumerable steps that is happily complete and is contained within one of the angle towers. This staircase is provided with a handrail ingeniously recessed in the side wall. A Lincolnshire antiquary we afterwards met assured me that this is the earliest handrail to a staircase known. I merely repeat what I have been told on apparently good authority, but I must confess I should have imagined that this convenience was of more ancient origin; however, in this matter my antiquarian knowledge does not carry me far enough. From the topmost tower we had a truly magnificent panorama presented to us; we looked down upon a wide green world, enlivened by the gray gleam of winding water-ways, and encircled by a horizon darkly, intensely blue. Our visions ranged over vast leagues of flat Fenland and wild wold. On one hand we could just trace the distance-dwarfed outlines of Lincoln's lordly minster, on the other the faint form of Boston's famous "stump."

Before leaving Tattershall we made a sketch of the glorious old tower that uprises so grandly from the level land around, which sketch is engraved with this chapter, and will give a better idea of the

TATTERSHALL TOWER.

stately pile than pages of printed description possibly could. It is a truly splendid specimen of medieval brick-work, and until I saw it I considered Layer Marney tower in Essex the finest example of brick building of the kind in England, Hurstmonceaux Castle in Sussex coming next; but now I have no hesitation whatever in giving the first place to Tattershall tower.

After finishing our sketch we once more resumed our pleasant pilgrimage, and soon found ourselves traversing a wide and wild Fenland district, over which the west wind blew fresh and strong. In a mile or so we crossed the river Witham, here running painfully straight between its embanked sides, more like a mighty dyke or canal than anything else, as though it were not to be trusted to flow as it would; but this is, more or less, the nature of nearly all the Fenland streams. Then we had a long stretch of level road, good for cycling, which faithfully followed for miles the side of a great "drain" (unhappy term), the road not being more than four feet above the water. So we came to Billinghay, a sleepy, remote, medieval-looking town, or large village, set well away from the busy world in the heart of the Fens; it gave us a feeling that it might be a hundred miles withdrawn from modern civilisation. A more dreamy—dreary, if you will—spot it would be hard to find in crowded England, and for this reason, though hardly to be termed picturesque, it fascinated us. It had such a quaint, old-world air, suggestive of untold rest—a peacefulness that is hardly of to-day.

Passing through another stretch of level Fenland, wide and free, we reached the pretty village of Anwick, where, as we drove through, we noticed a charming thatched cottage with big dormer windows in the roof, and walls so ivy-grown that we could not tell whether they were of stone, or flint, or brick,—a picture by the way. Here also we noticed three curious round buildings, each with a conical roof of thatch, from the apex of which rose a circular chimney. One of these did duty as a blacksmith's shop. After Anwick the country gradually lost its fen-like character, hedges took the place of dykes as fences, the streams were no longer embanked, the land became mildly undulating, and suddenly we found ourselves back again in "sleepy Sleaford." Here the gray-haired waiter recognised and welcomed us. While chatting with him as he laid our evening meal, he told us that he had come to the inn for a day, and had stayed on there for fifty years!

We left Sleaford early the next morning bound for Beckingham, and beyond to either Newark or Grantham. We went to Beckingham, as our antiquarian friend we had met at Horncastle had told us that the old hall there was full of the most beautiful and interesting art treasures, including some priceless tapestry. "I will write to the rector of the village," said he in the kindness of his heart; "he is a friend of mine, and I will tell him you are coming, and ask him to show you over the hall; you must not miss it. And if you go home through Grantham, as I expect you will, you really must

see Staunton Hall near there; it is a house with a history. I will give you a letter of introduction to the owner in case you may be able to use it." And this he did thereupon! Such was an example of the many kindnesses *pressed* upon us in the course of our tour. And to be a little previous, I may here state that on arriving at Beckingham, the genial rector there would not hear of our proceeding farther that day, but good-naturedly insisted upon our staying with him for the night as his guests, stabling our horses besides! Could kindness to utter strangers much farther go? "You're heartily welcome," said the rector smiling, and most hospitably did he entertain us. But, as I have already remarked, I am a little previous.

Shortly after leaving Sleaford we entered upon a wild, open country, hilly and sparsely populated, a country that reminded us forcibly of the Cotswolds, and one as different as possible from the level lowlands we had traversed the previous day. Once more it was brought to our minds that Lincolnshire is a land of hills as well as of fens! We were upon a glorious stretch of uplands that rose and fell around us in mighty sweeps, chequered by great fields, and enlivened here and there by comfortable-looking stone-built farmsteads, each with its rambling colony of outbuildings and corn-ricks gathered around. These, with a stray cottage or two for farm-labourers, saved the prospect from being desolate. Here water seems as scarce as it is over-abundant in the Fens! Indeed, we were afterwards told that sometimes in dry summers

water in the district is a rarer article than beer! This may be a slight exaggeration, though one gentleman who had a house in the neighbourhood assured us, that owing to his having to fetch all the water used in his establishment, he reckoned that in the year water was a dearer commodity to him than ale!

It was a grand drive we had over those bracing uplands, and we were sorry when this portion of our stage came to an end, and we found ourselves descending from them through a deep rocky cutting, overhung with shady trees, into the very charming village of Leadenham, that struck us as being clean, neat, and picturesque, a dreamy spot yet not dull. The houses there are well built of stone, and most of them have pleasant gardens, and all of them look cheerful. In the church we noticed some rather curious stained glass, but nothing else of special interest.

Beyond Leadenham we entered upon a rich, level, and purely agricultural country, the most notable feature of which was the large size of the fields. A short drive brought us to Brant Broughton, another very charming village, with an old church remarkable for the beauty and richness of its interior decorations. In the porch of this we were attracted by some curious lettering that we could make nothing of, except two dates 1630 and 1636. The church is glorious with gilt and colour, stained glass, and carvings; it looks all very Catholic and artistic, and should please those who like an ornate place of worship. Not only is the church beautiful

here, but the churchyard is well kept. These two things should ever go together, but, alas! such is the rare exception.

Then we had an uneventful drive on to Beckingham, where, as already related, we received a hearty welcome. But the hall which we had been sent here to see was bare! This was a disappointment as we had been led to expect so much of it. The house itself was plain and of no architectural merit whatever, not worth crossing even a road to see. The rector informed us that the property was left by the late squire to the second son of his eldest son, failing him to the second son of his second son; and there has never been a second son to either of them. The last squire but one was, according to report, somewhat of a character, for on winter evenings he used to go the round of the village at eight o'clock and act the part of the Curfew, calling out to the cottagers as he went by that it was time to go to bed and put the fires out! What the cottagers thought of this proceeding we did not learn.

The church of Beckingham is of no special interest, though, like most ancient churches, it possesses some curious features, and contains a quaint old Elizabethan clock in the tower, still keeping, more or less, faithful time. In 1810, the then rector, we were told, used to pay his workmen's wages on a Sunday morning, and the village shops were kept open on that day. Amongst the Entry of Marriages here, the following is perhaps worthy of a passing note:—"Under the Directory for the

Public Worship of God, 1645, Robert Parker and Anne Vicars were married on the 24th of May 1647, according to the Directory." Amongst the Entry of Burials we made a note of the following: —"Thomas Parker was buried in his mother's garden, April 15, 1681." It seems to have been not a very uncommon thing at the period for persons to be buried in gardens, burial in a churchyard being considered by some as flavouring too much of Popery! This was the second record of such an interment we had come upon within a week. Beckingham, we learnt, was five miles from a railway; it looked a thousand to us, though when we came to think of it we had to confess that we had never been so far from a railway in our lives, except when on the mid-Atlantic! It used to be called "Beckingham-behind-the-Times," the rector said. Well, it does not look as though it were much ahead of them now! It is a primitive place, without the virtue of being picturesque.

Next morning our kind host with thoughtful intent took us out to call on some of his oldest parishioners, the youngest of whom was eighty-two, in case we might gather something of interest from their conversation. One old man we visited was eighty-nine, and his wife was eighty-five. His father and grandfather had lived and died in Beckingham, he told us, and though close upon ninety he still managed to do all the work on a garden of over an acre. He had only travelled in a train once, and that was to London; he had only smoked once, and then he smoked five ounces of tobacco right

off, and his tongue was sore for weeks afterwards; he could see no pleasure in smoking. When he was a young man he used generally to walk to Lincoln and back on Sundays, a distance of twenty-nine miles, besides doing his regular work as a farm-labourer on week-days, for which he was paid the exorbitant wage of from 7s. to 9s. a week, out of which he actually managed to pay rent for a cottage and brought up a family of twelve children. "My hours of toil were from six o'clock in the morning till six o'clock in the evening, and I had to start from my home at five and got back at seven." We thought the expression "my hours of toil" much to the point; but he did not appear to consider that his life had been a particularly hard one, indeed he remarked that he could not understand the present generation—"they can neither work nor walk," and he praised God that he could still work!

Then we visited a Mrs. Sarah Watson, who said she was born in 1805. When she was a girl she saw a man hanging on a gibbet at Harby in Lincolnshire, which stood on the spot where he committed a murder. She used to go out to the gibbet with friends to watch which of the murderer's bones would fall off next! "Ah! them were the good old days," she exclaimed, "life were exciting then. Now I cannot walk; but I'm fond of reading. I've read the Bible through from the first page to the last, all save the hard names, and I've begun it afresh but have not got through it again yet. I've read *Pilgrim's Progress;* that *is* an interesting book, I did enjoy it." There was some-

thing very pathetic in our talks with these poor and patient old folk, and I could moralise here were I inclined that way, but I prefer to leave my readers to do this for themselves. I give the text and spare the sermon!

CHAPTER XXI

A cross-country road—A famous hill—Another medieval inn—"The Drunken Sermon"—Bottesford—Staunton Hall—Old family deeds—A chained library—Woolsthorpe manor-house—A great inventor!—Melton Mowbray—Oakham—A quaint old manorial custom—Rockingham Castle—Kirby.

From "Beckingham-behind-the-Times" we drove on to the old historic town of Grantham, a town that still retains much of its ancient picturesqueness though it is certainly not slothful, but rather pleasantly progressive. Our road led us through a very pretty country, but the way was rather hard to find as the turnings were many, the guide-posts few, and some of the few illegible. As we drove on, the distance showed clearly defined and darkly blue, we could plainly see the spire of Claypole church on the horizon, rising sharply into the air over wood and field; now there is a local saying at Beckingham that "when you cannot see Claypole church spire, it is sure to be fine," if the converse of this meant rain we ought to have had it, for besides the barometer was low and falling, and the sky cloudy, so the road being good, though narrow, we sped along with what haste we could.

At Fenton, the first hamlet we came to, we pulled up a few minutes in spite of the threatening

weather, to inspect a picturesque and interesting old manor-house, a little off the wayside, a house somewhat modernised, and apparently turned into a farmstead. Just above one of the windows of this was a stone inscribed "1507—R. L.," and in front of it separated by a little garden, which erst doubtless formed a courtyard, stood a gray old Jacobean gateway, with a coat-of-arms boldly engraved on the top. Just beyond this time-toned manor-house was the ancient church, worn and gray; the hoary church and old-time home with its quaint gateway made a very effective picture; a genuine bit of old England. Manifestly the country about here is not one given to change, it all bears a mellow, peaceful look that comes of contented abiding, and is so soothing to the eye, wearied with the ugliness of modern towns, and the architectural eyesores of the modern builder.

Then proceeding in due course, we passed through Stubton, a little hamlet in no special way noteworthy, with its churchyard by the roadside, a goodly portion of the latter being taken up with a yew-enclosed tomb. We needs must carry our dignity down to the grave—but how of the humble dead who lie beneath their grass-grown graves un-monumented?

> Forget not Earth, thy disappointed Dead!
> Forget not Earth, thy disinherited!
> Forget not the forgotten! keep a strain
> Of divine sorrow in sweet undertone
> For all the dead who lived and died in vain!
> Imperial Future when in countless train
> The generations lead thee to thy throne,
> Forget not the forgotten and unknown!

In another mile or two we reached the charming village of Brandon situated in a wooded valley, backed by a long line of church-dotted hills ; a line of hills stretching far away to the right and left that form the backbone of Lincolnshire, and are known locally by the curious title of "the Cliff." From this pleasant rural spot an excellent going road brought us to another pretty village with a grand and very interesting-looking church, in the quiet God's acre of which was a quaint sun-dial raised on the top of a tall stone pillar ; the church doors were carefully locked, so we did not see inside. As at Fenton, so here, close by the church, stands an old manor-hall, a pleasant bit of past-century building.

Soon after this we struck upon the old Great North Road and began to mount the long and stiff Gonerby Hill, famous in the old coaching days as the worst "pitch" on the road between London and Edinburgh. It is a striking fact that the worst hill on the old main high-road, close upon four hundred miles in length, should be in Lincolnshire, a county supposed to be so flat! It may be remembered that Scott, who frequently travelled this road, makes mention of this hill in *The Heart of Midlothian.* Jeanie Deans, on leaving the Saracen's Head at Newark, bound for Grantham, was assured, "It was all plain road, except a high mountain called Gunnerby Hill about three miles from Grantham, which was her stage for the night. 'I'm glad to hear there's a hill,' said Jeanie, 'for baith my sight and my very feet are weary o' sic tracts o' level ground—it looks a' the way between this

and York as if a' the land had been trenched and levelled, whilk is very wearisome to my Scotch een . . .' 'As for the matter of that, young woman,' said mine host, 'an you be so fond o' hill, I carena an thou couldst carry Gunnerby away with thee in thy lap, for it's a murder to post-horses.'"

From the top of Gonerby Hill or Gunnerby (according to the old maps) we had a long run down into Grantham, where we sought "shelter and a night's lodging" beneath the sign of the "Angel," one of the few medieval hostelries left to us; at the moment I can only call to memory six others in England, but there may be more.

A most interesting old building is the Angel at Grantham, with its weather-worn and time-stained front of stone facing the street and giving it quite a special character; nor do you come upon so aged and historic an hostelry every day. At the end of the drip mouldings on either side of the central archway that gives access to the building, are sculptured heads representing those of Edward III. and Philippa his Queen; at least so we were told, we had no other means of knowing whom the heads were intended for. One has to take many things on faith in this world! Over the archway projects a fine oriel window ornamented with carvings, the window being supported on a corbel composed of an angel with outspread wings. It was in this very building — according to our landlord who had naturally studied the history of his old house—that King John held his Court on 23rd February 1213

(a fairly long time to date back to); and Richard III. signed the death-warrant of the Duke of Buckingham on 19th October 1483, in a room still called the "King's Chamber." We found that we had this very chamber allotted to us as our bedroom—a room that surely should be haunted, if ever a room were; but we slept soundly there, and if any ghost did appear he did not disturb us; anyway we were far too sleepy, after our long drive in the open air, to trouble about such trifles as ghosts! I verily believe if one had appeared that we should simply have turned lazily over, and have told him angrily not to bother us! A driving tour begets iron nerves and dreamless slumbers.

Here in this ancient and storied hostelry we latter-day travellers were made exceedingly comfortable; we were even provided with the wholly unexpected, and, be it confessed, undesired, luxury of the electric light—which indeed appeared far too anachronistic for its surroundings. So comfortable were we made, that, remembering our letter of introduction, and finding that Staunton Hall was some nine miles away, we determined to drive there and back on the morrow, and stay on at the "Angel" over another day, though we required no excuse to do so.

During the evening, whilst making sundry small purchases at a shop, we overheard one of a party of purchasers ask another if he had heard the drunken sermon? The question sounded to us like a bit of local scandal, and though we much dislike all scandal, still in this case curiosity got the

better of our dislikes, and when his customers had gone, we ventured to ask the shopman what the scandal was. "Bless you, sir," replied he, "there's no scandal at all; we're far too good in Grantham to have any scandals." We were delighted to hear this, and thereupon thought what a delightful place Grantham must be to live in! It was explained to us that, according to an ancient will of a certain Michael Solomon, the tenant of the "Angel" has to pay a sum of two guineas every year to the vicar, in return for which the vicar has to preach a sermon against drunkenness, which he does annually on the first Sunday after the mayor's election. And this sermon is known locally as the "drunken sermon." I only devoutly wish that all scandals were so readily explained away, for then the world would be a much pleasanter place to live in!

Early next morning we set off for Staunton Hall. Soon after getting free of the town we had a fine, though distant, view of Belvoir Castle, rising prominently and picturesquely out of the woods to our left, with the misty hills of Leicestershire forming an effective background. Passing on through a pleasant stretch of country we reached the pretty village of Bottesford, where we forded a little river, hence doubtless the name. Here we observed the steps and base of the shaft of a market-cross. The church chanced to be open, so we took a glance inside and found there a number of grand monuments to the Lords of Belvoir. A portion of the inscription on the magnificent tomb of the sixth Earl of Rutland we copied as showing the strange

faith in sorcery held at the period even in the highest ranks of society, and this is it: "In 1608, he married ye Lady Cecilia Hungerford by whom he had two sonnes both w̄ch died in their infancy by wicked practise and sorcerye." Monumental inscriptions are oftentimes curious reading, and frequently throw interesting sidelights on the superstitions and manners of bygone days.

There was nothing further noteworthy on our way till we reached Staunton Hall, an ancient home set away in a tree-shaded park, and here our letter of introduction ensured us a welcome; not only did the lady of the house very kindly offer to show us over it herself, but also most courteously granted us the highly appreciated privilege of inspecting several of the old family documents, some of which were of exceeding interest. Amongst the treasures preserved here is the gold key of the Staunton tower and the Royal apartments at Belvoir Castle. During the Parliamentary wars, it appears Colonel Staunton, of Staunton Hall, held and defended Belvoir Castle for the King. As a recognition for this act, the head of the Staunton family are privileged to go to Belvoir Castle when any member of the Royal family is about to visit there, and to present to such member the gold key which nominally gives access to the Royal apartments.

We noticed, as we drove up, over the entrance doorway the date 1573, inscribed below a coat-of-arms, but this, we were told, only relates to the doorway which was a later addition to the building; the year of the erection of the hall being actually a little

earlier, namely in 1554, as shown cut in a stone let into one of the chimney stacks. The great and original heavy oak door is still *in situ;* indented and in places pierced with shots and bullets that were fired at it during the siege of the house by the Parliamentary forces; during which attack the house was bravely defended by the wife of Colonel Staunton, who, just before it was captured, made her escape with her children. On the door over these records of that struggle is cut the date thereof, 1642. The ancient and historic door is preserved by an inner one of oak attached thereto.

Amongst the very interesting family documents is a deed in old Latin, temp. 1323, relating to the bearing of the Cross in the Holy Land on behalf of William de Staunton, to which is attached a translation; this latter we copied, and it runs as follows—

To all people about to see or hear this letter, I, William de Staunton give greeting. Know ye that in consideration of high esteem and for the safety of my own soul, and those of my ancestors and successors have made free Hugo Travers, the son of Simon of Alurington in which place he assumed the Cross for me, and have quit claimed for myself and my heirs for ever, himself and his possessions from all terrene service and exaction, and have yielded him with all his possessions or property to the Lord and the Church of St. Mary of Staunton, whereby I desire and grant that he and his property may remain free for ever under the protection of the Lord and St. Mary, and the restored church of Staunton. Witness hereof, Witto, priest of Kidvington, Radulpho de St. Paul. Walter de Hou.

And many others, the date following. Which document is food for thought, and seems to show how easily, according to the Church of those days, the

soul of a rich man, his ancestors, and descendants could be saved by vicarious deed.

Then we were shown a signed authority from Charles I. for "Colonell" Staunton to raise a regiment of 1200 foot in the king's service. The next document taken in due chronological order ran thus :—

CHARLES R.

Our express will and pleasure therefor is that you presently uppon the receipt of this our orders draw all your Regiment out of our Garrison of Newark and with them to march into Tuxford and go forward under the order of Lt. Generall Villiers. This you are punctually to obey, and for your so doing this shall be your warrant.

Given at our Court at Welbeck this 16 of August 1645.

To our trusty and welbeloved
Colonell Staunton at Newark
By his Majesty's Commands
E. W. W. Wather.

For the time, the spelling of this is exceptionally correct. Then we were shown another document signed by Oliver Cromwell, that explains itself sufficiently.

June 1646. A Licence to Mrs. Ann Staunton, or whom she should appoint, to look into and oversee the repairs of the Manor House of Staunton in the County of Nottingham, late belonging to Colonel Staunton, a Delinquent to the Parliament Service, and there to remain during such time as the said house shall be repairing.

Oliver Cromwell.

There were other interesting documents we inspected, but alas! space forbids my giving any more here.

On our way back to Grantham we pulled up at

the little village of Sedgebrook, attracted by the fine and interesting-looking church there, and also in search of any quaint epitaph. We found the rector, manifestly an ardent antiquary, in the church, which was being lovingly repaired under his skilled supervision. He did not know of any noteworthy epitaph in the churchyard, but he could give us one he copied at Shipley in Derbyshire, if we cared to have it. We did, and here it is :—

> God saw good as I lopped off wood
> I fell from the top of a tree,
> I met with a check that broke my neck
> And so God lopped off me.

Sedgebrook church is very interesting, I could easily enlarge upon it to the extent of a whole chapter did the exigencies of space permit. Here is the Markham chapel in which the "Upright Judge," Chief Justice Markham of the King's Bench, 1462, is buried, or is supposed to be; his tomb has been destroyed. There is a hazy local tradition that only his effigy is buried here and not his body; also the same tradition has it that the judge, on being deprived of his office by the king, took sanctuary in the church and was fed there by his daughter, whose incised slab representing her head resting on a pillow now finds a place on the wall of the chapel. "Now," said the rector, "some clever people come here and when they see that, they at once take the pillow for a head-dress, and one gentleman even went so far as to call attention to it in a publication as a unique example of a head-dress of the period!" Of course the slab was intended to be laid flat on

the floor, when the effect of the pillow, a little out of drawing by the way, would have been more natural. After this, we hastened back again to our comfortable medieval hostelry at Grantham, well satisfied with our day's wanderings.

Early next morning, before starting on the road, we paid a visit to the grand parish church of the town, whose splendid tower is one of the finest in the kingdom, besides being one of the earliest, ranking, according to some architectural authorities, second only to that of Salisbury Cathedral. But what interested us most in this glorious old church, with its broad aisles and general feeling of spaciousness, was its library of chained books of rare medieval works; this is contained in a large parvise chamber over the south porch. The books are curiously placed on their shelves with their backs to the wall, their titles being written on their front pages. We noticed that many of the works suffered from iron-mould owing to the chain fastenings and damp.

We left Grantham in a mist that inclined to rain; what the country we passed through at first was like I cannot say, but half seen through the veil of mist, the hills around loomed vague and vast, poetically mysterious; even the near fields and hedgerows were only dimly discernible, and the trees by the roadside dripped with moisture that was almost as wetting as an honest rain, but it in no way damped our spirits. We enjoyed the mist, it left so much to our imagination, and it allowed us to picture the scenery much as we wished it to be;

thus the possibly commonplace assumed, in our eyes, the romantic. So, driving on through a land half real, half the creation of our fancy, we reached Great Ponton, a tiny hamlet with an ancient church, solemn with the duskiness of centuries. Close to the hoary fane stood, pathetic in neglect, a quaint, old-time, stone-built home with "stepped gables," whose weather-worn aged-toned walls were broken by mullioned windows rounded at the top, and without transoms. A home of the past, full of character. Without, the stone gateway pillars still stand, gray and desolate, that used to give access to the mansion; the space between them now being barred merely by broken hurdles, and in the fore-court grasses and nettles flourished exceedingly. The building somehow involuntarily called to our mind Hood's famous poem of "The Haunted House."

Then passing through a pleasant country of woods, we suddenly found ourselves in the old-fashioned village of Colsterworth, where at the "White Lion" we baited our horses and refreshed ourselves; after which we set out on foot across the fields to find Woolsthorpe Manor-house where Sir Isaac Newton was born, which we made out from our map to be about a mile and a half distant, though it took us a good two miles to get there all through asking our way; for we got directed to the "Sir Isaac Newton" public-house instead of to his birth-place! At last, however, we found the modest old manor-house, a small but pleasant enough looking home, whose stone walls are ivy-draped, but, though substantially built, the place has no particular archi-

tectural merit ; in front of it is an orchard, just as in the days of old, and it was in this orchard that Newton saw the historic apple fall. We should imagine that the house and surroundings generally, except possibly the ugly cart-shed at the back, are but little altered since the famous philosopher's time. We at once set to work to make a sketch of the old house, reproduced herewith ; in doing this we observed, just over the doorway, where one often finds a coat-of-arms, a stone carved with the representation of two "cross-bones" in a shield, and below this gruesome device we read the following inscription :—

In this Manor House
Sir Isaac Newton Knt
Was born 25th December
A.D. 1642.

After finishing our sketch, we ventured to knock at the front door and politely asked if it would be possible for a perfect stranger just to take a glance at the room in which Newton was born. A pleasant-faced woman opened it, presumably the lady of the house, and with a smile she said, "Certainly, if it would interest you to see it." We replied, with many thanks for the unexpected courtesy, that it would very much interest us to see it, whereupon we were taken upstairs to a comfortable old-fashioned chamber, in no way remarkable for size or quaintness, unless a fireplace in the corner can be considered the latter. The position of this room is shown by the upper front mullioned window to the left of the house in the picture, the

window to the side being built up. In a corner of this chamber is a small marble tablet let into the wall and inscribed :—

> Sir Isaac Newton (Son of Isaac Newton
> Lord of the Manor of Woolsthorpe) was born
> in this room December 25th 1642.
>
> Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night
> God said, "Let Newton be" and all was light.
> POPE.

Then we were taken to see Newton's tiny study, situated upstairs and on the same floor. Here is hung a drawing of the very tree from which Newton saw the apple fall. It is a curious-looking old gnarled tree, and I have taken the artist's license of introducing it in the foreground of my sketch, in place of a very ordinary tree of the same kind that really was growing on that spot. I seldom take such liberties, but in this exceptional case I thought a likeness of the famous old tree might be of interest, and, accompanied by an explanation, allowable. Though the original tree is dead, a graft, we were informed, was made from it, which is growing now in the orchard in the very spot that the old one grew; strangely enough it greatly resembles its historic predecessor.

Then we made our way back to Colsterworth, crossing the river Witham by a foot-bridge, the road traversing it by a ford. The bottom of the stream, we noticed, was paved with flat stones, so that the carts in driving through should not sink in the mud, an arrangement that I do not remember to have noted elsewhere. Before returning to our

WOOLSTHORPE MANOR-HOUSE: THE BIRTHPLACE OF SIR ISAAC NEWTON.

hotel we took a look at the church, as it was on our road, and the door happened to be open. We descended into the building down two or three steps, from which we concluded, rightly as we discovered, that it was dedicated to John the Baptist. As the late Rev. R. S. Hawker, the famous Cornish vicar, says, "Every church dedicated to John the Baptizer is thus arranged. We go down into them, as those about to be baptized of John went down into the water." The church is well worth inspection; but what chiefly interested us in it was a stone sun-dial let into the north wall with the following inscription below:—"Newton, aged nine years, cut with his penknife this dial." Above, one of the corbels is carved with the likeness of Sir Isaac Newton, a delightful conceit that pleased us greatly. An old body we spoke to in the church amused us not a little by exclaiming, "Yes, he were a wonderful man Sir Isaac to invent gravitation!" "Ah!" we replied, "however did the world get on before he invented it?" But our satire fell harmless. "Oh, very well," she responded; "it b'aint no good of to nobody as far as I can see." And with this we took our departure, and returned to our inn.

After a hurried glance at our map before starting, we decided to drive across country to Melton Mowbray, and to stop there the night. On inquiring about the way we were informed that we could not miss it, as it was well "sign-posted," a fresh expression to us. Just as we started the rain came down. Lincolnshire had greeted our coming with sunny smiles, and now

she bade us good-bye in tears,—that was the poetical way of looking at the unpromising state of the weather! Of the road on to Melton Mowbray I cannot say much, as it rained the whole way persistently. In spite of this the country struck us as being distinctly pretty in parts, especially at one spot where we dipped down through woods to a ford over a shallow but fairly wide river, across which was a very Welsh-like bridge for pedestrians. On a fine day this would have been an ideal spot to make a sketch or to take a photograph of. Even seen through the rain its picturesqueness impressed itself so on us that during the evening we made a very fair memory-sketch of the quiet nook.

It rained all that night at Melton Mowbray, at least the ostler said it did, and we took his word for it, as we were fast asleep. Anyhow it was raining in the morning when we awoke; and though we waited till eleven o'clock before resuming our journey, the weather had not the grace to improve, so we set forth in the rain bound for Oakham on our way to Uppingham. As we drove on the weather improved. Now and again the sun struggled out for a time, and the cloud-scapes above and the strong play of light and shade on the hilly landscape below were very effective. The country was wild and beautiful, with a beauty of hill and dale, of wood, and hedgerowed lane that called Devonshire to remembrance. The only place we passed through on the way of any importance was the straggling and very pretty village of Langham. Shortly after this we found ourselves in Oakham,

which struck us as a clean, neat little town with thatched and slab-roofed houses in its streets, and a charming old butter-cross set away in a quiet corner, with a sun-dial on the top and the ancient stocks below. Near to the butter-cross stands the banqueting-hall of Oakham Castle, all that now remains of that stronghold. Within, the walls of this hall are hung round with a number of gigantic horse-shoes, some gilt, and nearly all with the names of titled people painted on them. On inquiring the wherefore of this, we were told that the custom of the Lord of the Manor anciently exerted to show his authority, and still maintained, is to claim a horse-shoe from every peer who passes through the town for the first time. Instead of real horse-shoes, in every instance but one, large imitation shoes to hang up have been purposely made. The one real horse-shoe is that of Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, dated 1840. The oldest shoe is that of Queen Elizabeth. Certainly the custom is a curious one, and it would be interesting to trace its origin.

From Oakham we had a delightful drive of six miles on to Uppingham. The weather had cleared up, and the sun was shining quite cheerfully again. There was a freshness and a fragrance in the air that was very grateful to us. Our road was level at first, then we had a stiffish climb up to Manton-on-the-Hill, a forsaken-looking village of stone-built houses set on a height and grouped around an ancient church that looked so pathetically old. Most of the houses there were gray with age and

picturesque besides, with porches, mullioned windows, and moulded gables, one of the latter being surmounted by a quaint sun-dial. We just took a glance at the interior of the crumbling church which was interesting; but an old woman we discovered there sweeping the floors interested us even more, for humanity, *when characteristic*, is ever better worth study than mere inert matter. She concluded her long life's story by saying that she was seventy-two, and cleaned the church and blew the organ, as it was a little help towards living, her husband being paralysed, "and he's only seventy-seven." Just as though it were a reproach to him his being helpless at that early age!

A "give and take" road with more takes than gives, it seemed to us, brought us to Uppingham, where we found a comfortable hotel. Here, while the daylight lasted, we took a stroll round the town, and admired the new school buildings in the course of erection. Then we went into one or two shops to make a few purchases. At the first of these we remarked to the shopman, "You've got a fine school here." His reply rather took us aback. "Yes, we have," said he. "It's all school here now and no town; we're as school-ridden as Spain is priest-ridden," and he spoke like a man who was sorely vexed in his soul about something; but he would not condescend to any explanations, so we left him and went to a stationer's shop for some trifle. Here we saw a photograph of a fine ruined mansion that attracted us from its manifest former importance, so we inquired where it was. "Oh, that's Kirby,"

we were told; "it's near Rockingham, and some seven miles from here. It's well worth seeing. It was once nearly purchased for a residence for George III. It's a grand old place all falling to ruin, as you see." Upon this we purchased the photograph, and determined to visit Kirby the next day, as we found we could take it on our way by a slight detour.

It was a grand drive over a wild open country to Rockingham, a charming village nestled at the foot of a wooded hill, which was crowned by a modernised feudal castle known locally as "the Windsor Castle of the Midlands." Here, with our usual good-fortune, we were permitted to see the gardens and the interior of the castle. We entered the courtyard through a great arched gateway, guarded on either hand by two massive round towers built in the Edwardian age, and as strong and substantial now as then. First we strolled round the old garden enclosed by a high stone wall. Alongside of this wall runs a broad terrace, from which elevated position looking down we had a glorious and space-expressing prospect over the wild Welland valley, bounded to the north by the wilderness of Lincolnshire hills showing green, gray, and faintly blue.

The interior of the castle is interesting. This, with the treasures stored therein, would need pages of description to do them justice. On the roof-beam of the entrance-hall we noticed the following motto painted:—"This Howse Shall Be Preserved And Never Will Decaye Wheare The Almightie

God Is Honored And Served Daye By Daye, 1579." Here is an iron treasure-chest that once belonged to King John. In the old Elizabethan gallery are a number of interesting paintings by Van Dyke, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and other famous artists. Here also was pointed out to us a portrait supposed by some authorities to represent Queen Elizabeth when an infant, but it is of doubtful authenticity. Want of space unfortunately prevents my giving further particulars of this old historic pile set in its romantic park, rich in wood and charmingly varied by rugged hill and deep dale.

We had a stiff climb out of Rockingham when we reached high ground, and turning to our left gradually descended to a well-wooded valley. In the heart of this we espied the ruined mansion of Kirby, situated low in a wild and desolate-looking park, and some half mile or so from the public road. Driving under the time-grayed gateway here, we had presented to us a vision of picturesque and pathetic decay. The vast mass of ruins attests the former grandeur of the place. When we were there cows were feeding in its grass-grown courtyards, portions of the structure were roofless, and the mullioned windows glazeless, birds wandered in and out of its deserted chambers, and weeds found lodgment in the crevices of its weather-beaten walls. It was a scene of desolation. But what struck us amongst the decay of roof, floor, panel, and window was the enduring quality of the stone-work. The masonry appeared little injured by mere age or weathering, it being damaged chiefly by the tumb-

ling down of roofs and floors; the fine carvings on the stones being almost as sharp as when first chiselled centuries now ago. It would be interesting to learn where this splendid stone was quarried; it is manifestly magnificent building material. Architects might do worse than study this question. There is no doubt as to the designer of this stately mansion, for John Thorpe's plans of it are preserved in the Soane Museum, endorsed in his handwriting, "Kirby, whereof I layd the first stone, 1570."

We were now in Northamptonshire that, according to the proverb, has

> More spires and more squires
> More bells and more wells

than any other county.

CHAPTER XXII

A well-preserved relic—An old English home—Authorities differ—Rooms on the top of a church tower—A medieval-looking town—A Saxon tower—Bedford—Bunyan's birthplace—Luton—The end of the journey.

Leaving Kirby we soon reached the very pretty village of Deene, on passing through which we noticed a picturesque creeper-covered little hostel with the sign of "The Sea-horse," though it was so far inland. Then our road led us round Deene Park, shady with branching beeches and leafy elms, just giving us a glance of the interesting old Tudor mansion peeping through the woods, and so by the side of a little lake to another picturesque village called Great Weldon, some of the houses wherein are quaintly built and worthy of study. A stone district seems to breed good architecture, even in cottages. After this we had an open stretch of country on to Geddington where we found, to our delight, a Queen Eleanor Cross, little damaged, either by the hand of man, or time. It was a pleasure to come unexpectedly upon this well-preserved relic of the vanished long ago.

Shortly after this our road brought us to Boughton Park, a fine demesne with a large and rather ugly mansion set therein. What interested

us here was the arrangement of wide avenues of elms, extending from the house in every direction, rising and falling with the varying undulations of the ground. The effect, though formal, is fine in the sense that it gives a feeling of great expanse by leading the eye far away into the distant country on all sides. It is magnificent, but it is too apparently artificial to be commended; a formal garden is all very well, and very charming; a garden is confessedly Nature tamed, to a greater or less extent, but one does not desire a whole country-side tamed! These stately avenues, we learnt afterwards, were planted by the second Duke of Montague, from which grand hobby he justly earned the title of "the planter Duke." Soon after this we entered the busy and thriving town of Kettering, where we fortunately discovered a very comfortable hotel with a most obliging landlord.

We resumed our journey early the next morning; we left our hotel and worthy landlord with regret, and the busy town with pleasure; and glad we were to get into the quiet country again. We had a rather hilly road at first, with charming woodland prospects opening out ever and again; in about two miles we reached the small hamlet of Barton Seagrave,—here we noticed more avenues of elms radiating from the ancient church, possibly part of the scheme of "the planter Duke." Then driving on we came to the large village of Burton Latimer, where to the left of our road we espied a lovely old English home of many gables, great chimney stacks and mullioned windows, with a gray-green slab-

stone roof broken above by dormers. On one chimney was a sun-dial, and on one gable we noticed a very quaint weather-vane, whilst in the forecourt stood an ancient pigeon-cote. A charming home of past days, that with its old-fashioned gardens looked as though it had stepped out of some picture, an artist's ideal realised. You do not frequently set your eyes upon such a delightful actuality in this commonplace age!

The next village on our way was Finedon, a straggling place; here by the roadside we noticed a monument gray with years, and without any inscription that we could find. So we asked a man the meaning of it; he replied that it was erected by a gentleman whose horse had fallen dead on the spot after being driven hard by his master to catch the mail-coach. Another man who was listening to the conversation declared positively that our informant was all wrong, and that it was put up as a memorial of somebody who was drowned at sea. So hard is it to arrive at facts in this world! Then the first man got in a rage with the second man and called him bad names, and said he knew "nought about it," and as the argument was already heated and promised to be prolonged, we politely thanked both parties for their trustworthy information and departed. As we drove away each man shouted after us that he was right; and we shouted back pleasantly we were quite sure of it!

The next point of interest on our way was the long-named little town of Irthlingborough, with its ancient market-cross and fine old church. The

church tower, detached from the main building, is surmounted by a tall and quaint octagonal structure that gives it a strangely unecclesiastical appearance, and a very original one too. Well, originality that escapes eccentricity is pleasing. Our church towers and spires, however architecturally good in themselves, too often lack individuality, in that they resemble one another over much; even a beautiful form by too frequent repetition may become monotonous. For a wonder we found the clerk in the church; he told us that the tower had been rebuilt, as we could see, but it was, externally, an exact reproduction of the old one. The interior was not quite the same, as there was a stone staircase up the tower, whilst in the old one you had to get up by ladders. The octagonal structure at the top, now mere enclosed space, used to consist, we were told, of three stories, with a room in each provided with a fireplace, but what the use of these rooms was, the clerk did not know. The fireplaces showed that they were intended to be lived in, yet dwelling-rooms right on the top of a tall church tower seemed singular; at any rate the chambers must have had a plentiful supply of fresh air! We wondered if they could have been intended for a priest's home. But whatever their purpose, dwelling rooms in such a position are surely unique.

A little farther on we crossed the silvery winding river Nene by a gray and ancient bridge, and had before us, set pleasantly on the top of a hill the picturesque old town of Higham Ferrers looking quite romantic with its old-time irregular-roofed

houses, and grand church spire, strongly silhouetted against the bright blue sky. Higham Ferrers struck us as a most interesting little town, with its fine old fane, around which are clustered gray crumbling buildings of the medieval age, in the shape of a bede-house, a school, a vicarage, and a Decorated stone cross; all in the Gothic style, with many traceried windows, and supporting buttresses to the walls. We owe this effective group of buildings to the good Archbishop Chicheley, who was born in the town, and when he became great and famous raised them in honour of his birthplace. He also erected a college here, of which only a great archway remains, and some decayed walls with broken mullioned windows; this faces the main street of the town, and when we were there simply enclosed a dirty farmyard. Within, the church is most interesting, and possesses some exceedingly fine old brasses, many of the fifteenth century; amongst the number a brass to a priest is noteworthy, as are also the royal arms of England sculptured in relief, on the side panels of a very beautiful altar-tomb placed under a stone canopy, suggesting the possibility of its having been prepared for royalty, though probably never used; the place where the recumbent effigy should be is now taken up by a brass that manifestly was intended for the floor. There are also some quaint medieval tiles before the altar, ornamented with curiously figured animals in yellow on a red ground. Altogether the interior of this splendid and ancient church affords a mine of good things for the antiquary or ecclesiologist.

Leaving Higham Ferrers we had a pleasant drive, mostly downhill, to the hamlet of Bletsoe, where we came in sight again of the slow-gliding Ouse, the valley of which we followed on to Bedford. Some short way beyond Bletsoe we passed through Clapham, unlike its ugly London namesake, a pretty rural village by the river-side. Here we noticed the striking-looking Saxon tower of the church, more like a castle keep than an ecclesiastical structure. It forms quite a feature in the landscape, and asserts itself by its peculiarity.

On arriving at Bedford it began to rain, and it was raining again in the morning; but about midday the steady downpour changed to intermittent showers. So, early in the afternoon, we started off for a twenty-mile drive on to Luton, which we did in one stage. In a little over a mile we found ourselves passing through a very pretty village, and on inquiring the name thereof discovered it to be Elstow, the birthplace of John Bunyan, a spot that does not seem to have changed much to the eye since that event, for, if the expression be allowed, it looks still "genuinely Old English."

After Elstow we had a fine open country before us, bounded ahead by a low range of wooded hills, hills that showed softly blue under the shadow of a passing cloud, a golden green in the transient gleams of sunshine, and were sometimes lost altogether or half hidden by the mist of a trailing shower. Then driving on in due course we reached the hills and had a stiff climb up them, followed by a long and glorious run down through fragrant-

scented pine-woods with open spaces here and there given over to a little forest of waving bracken, green, red, and yellow, in all the loveliness of their autumn tints. At the foot of the descent we found a charming little hamlet set in woods, past which a clear stream purled peacefully; crossing this stream we had another climb succeeded by a level winding elm-bound road, with an uneventful landscape on either hand, of flat fields stretching far away to a misty horizon. Now the rounded chalk hills loomed up finely in front of us, the clouds stooping to their low summits, so that it was hard to tell where the land ended and the sky began; and in the fast-fading light a sense of mystery and the majesty of space pervaded the prospect. Our road eventually led us along the sides of these hills and into the gathering gloom, then we dropped down into the cheerful lamp-lighted streets of busy Luton. From Luton we drove through picturesque Harpenden to historic St. Albans, with its much-restored abbey, and from St. Albans by Elstree and Edgeware we made our way back to London again. And so ended our most enjoyable wanderings on the pleasant old roads. Ours was purely a pleasure jaunt. We set forth on it determined, come what would, to enjoy ourselves, and we succeeded! Now, kind reader, the time has come when I must, perforce, bid you farewell.

Of all the words the English tongue can tell
The hardest one to utter is "Farewell."
But the fond hope that we may meet again
Relieves that word of more than half its pain.

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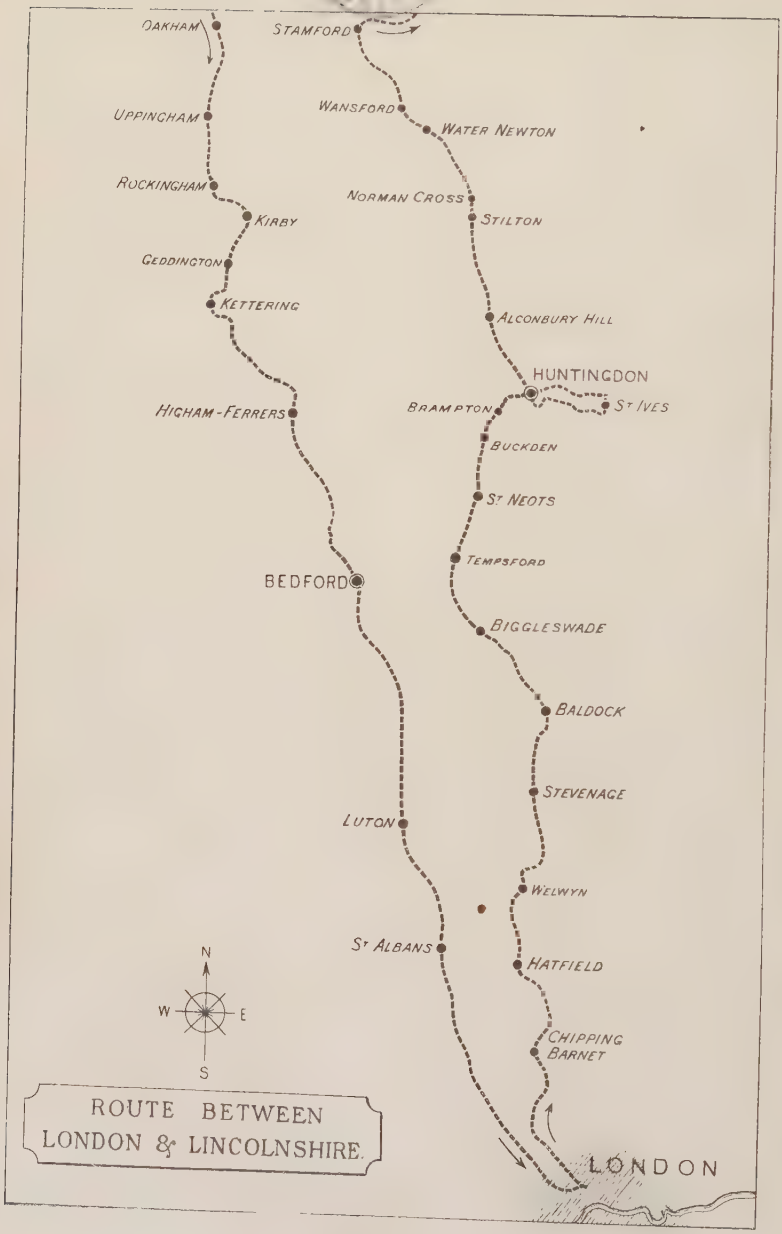
APPENDIX

ITINERARY OF JOURNEY

	Day's Stages in Miles.	Total Distance in Miles.
London to Stevenage	31	31
Stevenage to St. Neots . . .	25	56
St. Neots to Huntingdon . 11 Huntingdon to St. Ives and back 10	21	77
Huntingdon to Stamford *through Stilton* . . .	$25\frac{1}{2}$	$102\frac{1}{2}$
Stamford to Spalding *over the Fens and by Crowland*	$25\frac{1}{2}$	128
Spalding to Bourn	12	140
Bourn to Sleaford	18	158
Sleaford to Boston *by Swineshead and Frampton*	25	183
Boston to Wainfleet *across the Marshes* . . .	18	201
Wainfleet to Horncastle *by Spilsby and over the Wolds*	20	221
Round about Tennyson-land . .	20	241
Horncastle to Scrivelsby and back 5 Horncastle to Lincoln . 21	26	267

	Day's Stages in Miles.	Total Distance in Miles.
Lincoln to Woodhall Spa *over Lincoln Heath*	18	285
Round about Woodhall Spa	18	303
Woodhall Spa to Sleaford *by Tattershall Castle*	18	321
Sleaford to Beckingham *over "the Cliff"*	15	336
Beckingham to Grantham	15	351
Grantham to Staunton Hall and back by Bottesford	18	369
Grantham to Melton Mowbray *by Colsterworth*	21	390
Melton Mowbray to Uppingham *through Oakham*	16	406
Uppingham to Kettering *by Rockingham and Kirby*	22	428
Kettering to Bedford *through Higham Ferrers*	25	453
Bedford to Luton	20	473
Luton to London *through St. Albans*	28	501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UPPINGHAM
WANSFORD
WATER NEWTON
ROCKINGHAM
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KIRBY
GEDDINGTON
KETTERING
ALCONBURY HILL
HUNTINGDON
HIGHAM-FERRERS
BRAMPTON
ST IVES
BUCKDEN
ST NEOTS
TEMPSFORD
BEDFORD
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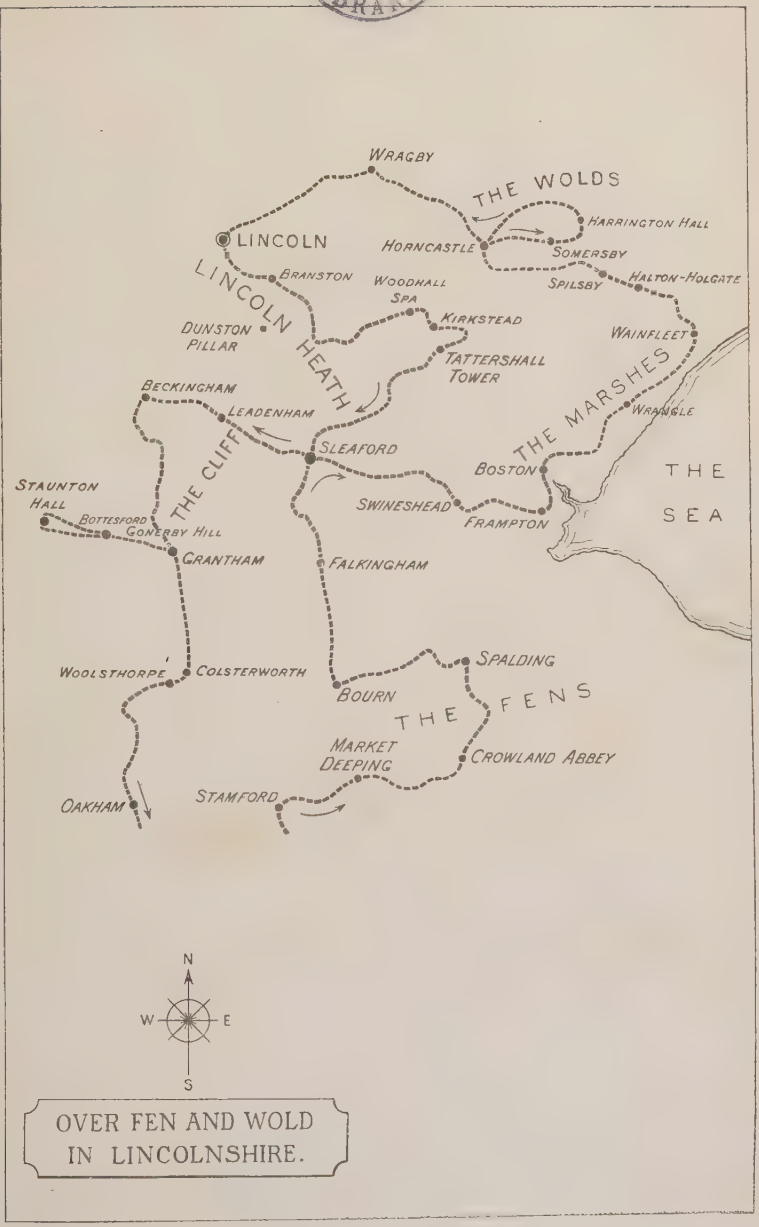

OVER FEN AND WOLD
IN LINCOLNSHIRE.

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